BOOK 4: New Dreams ch163-179-?-219 START

Book 4 Recap! Book 4 Recap! - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

The Story So Far

Welcome back to book four, Ultimate Level 1: New Dreams!

Here is a quick recap of the story so far.

Book 1: Max wanted to be a baker but as we know, a mysterious god (or gods) gave him a black skill. He was assaulted, bound and tossed into a wagon, unsure what would happen next. Getting out he took on the alter identity of Seth Pendal and grew stronger, learning that his black skill, Consume, can steal stats if they are higher than his base (unmodified) ones. After picking up a few skills, some good loot and killing a Fanatic Elf in Windsor Wheel (and picking up a sweet skill), Max flees to the next town, Rumstant.

There he finds out quickly he needs to group up, joining forces with Tanila, an elven Mage, Fowl, a Dwarven Warrior and Batrire, a Dwarven Healer. They have some fun, beat a few floors and eventually Max must reveal a little about himself and the power he possesses. They share some about their own secrets and the party gets to work, attacking dungeons, stopping a shade (ok, well they held it off) and working at getting stronger. Max also learns the power of books and knowledge (always read books, especially Ultimate Level 1!).

Book 1 ends with Max sharing that he believes he met a goddess, one that has given him an unfair advantage of better loot and harder bosses and dungeons to fight.

Book 2: Max comes out swinging, upgrading his weapon skill to all melee weapons! They find out dungeons are really giving them some extra love, even locking them in so that they can only escape if they win (or die… but they don't… or did they?)

Random luck? Curse of the Gods? Strings of Fate? Something leads Caleb to find and follow Max and the old reunion doesn't go well, causing Max to find out he's being followed. A little bit of torture and some payback nets him new skills and knowledge about the people seeking his life. Realizing that they may be closer than he thought, Max goes all in, telling the others.

It's a whirlwind of finishing up a few things, helping Aimee his local baker friend level up and then ditching town as they race off to Peltagow.

As always, Max's gotta pee and that leads to a massive gain in stats and skills when he's ambushed at night, killing a host of thieves and killers who came out during the full moon.

Max finds out his sonar skill can help him cheat at some gambling and he takes all the gold he can from the Beaver's Casino, entering the capital with enough cash to stay at a nice place.

Consume and Max have some problems as the skill wants to be a little more bloodthirsty and Max fights it off, continuing the dungeon crawl through the capital.

A bad rare spawn causes Batrire to almost die and left without enough money to pay the bill, Max steps into the Colosseum to try and earn a little gold while not losing his soul.

Some bad stuff happens… people die (not Max) and between killing an Elven Fanatatic and a Nobles son, Max gets out from the fights with almost nothing.

Thankfully Fowl bet everything on him winning and they get enough cash to pay for Batrire’s treatment.

Everything is looking up, Max and Tanila go for a walk… love might have been in the air until they are surrounded by elves ready to kill them both.

With no where else left to turn, Max gives in, letting Consume take over.

Book 3: The elvish group finds out the hard way they weren’t prepared for what stood before them. Consume shows Max the power it has and soon he’s filled with more stats and skills than one might imagine possible. They get a free ride to the guard place, find out his skill can also remove the killer aura and end up in the city, looking like he didn’t do a thing.

They sign up to join the Golden Axe Faction, pledging to be part of that group and begin grinding with haste.

A massive breakout of 4 Dungeons leads to the city being overwhelmed from all sides and the group goes out, barely surviving a massive ogre break. It leads to some growth and they get a chance to see the power of tower climbers who come and save the day.

Between learning they can break the dungeon (Forest Fires can be your friend), winning a drinking contest, celebrating a birthday party and growing closer, the biggest life thing is Max and Tanila finally admitting their feelings.

Upon hitting lvl 50 everything changes. Two options are on the table and the group attempts what hasn’t been done in generations. They enter the demon dungeon, hoping to defeat it and earn the boon that comes with it. Flexing their brains they outthink a dangerous area and Max has to let Consume out to save his friends.

After enjoying an all you can eat demon buffet, Max rejoins the group, facing down a demon way stronger than they should have and pull out a win. Avoiding a tricky demon lord they get the boon and head off to the dragon dungeon. (We’ll gloss over the epic abilities/spells Max picked up there).

The dragon dungeon is a cake walk. Because the dragon wants to meet the ones who pissed off the demons. A little talk, some quick discussion and Max gets to prove his value to the dragon, all with the hopes of getting some door prizes. Consume shows up, proving to the lord of the dungeon that he’s worth betting on and picks up a cool dragon tooth, dragon scale and mark (shhh that's a secret).

Now with that done, they pop off to the tower, and unable to resist the chance, go kill a few of the mobs on the first floor of the tower.

Book 4 - Flip the page - Find out.

Current Stats & Skills:

Max Hoste

18-Year-old Human Male

Level 1

Exp 1/1000

Tower Experience: .5%

HP: 1630/1630

MP: 1140/1140

Stamina: 815/815

STR: 161

DEX: 157

CON: 163

INT: 114

WIS: 114

Defense of the Dragon - .5%

Defense of the Demon - .5%

Demon Essence: - 340

Leather Boots - 1 DEX + 5% Speed Bonus while running

Black Quick Pants - 2 STR/DEX +10% Movement Bonus

Ogre’s Black Tunic - 3 STR/CON/DEX + 10% Magic Resist +10% Attack Damage

Black Bracers - 3 STR/CON +15% Damage decrease slashing/piercing

Belt of the Golem - 4 STR/CON +25% Damage decrease slashing/piercing

Scout Spider Helm - 5 STR/CON/DEX. Invisible State, Grants Minor Poison Resist

Cloak of Spider - 5 Dex. Spider Walk - 5 mins / 24 hour cooldown

Green Ring - 1 DEX

Black Rabbit Ring - 2 DEX

Ring of the Golem Prince - 4 CON +25% magic resist

Black Boss Band - 20% Stat Increase

Skills:

Baking - Common

Consume - Epic

Melee Weapon Mastery - Rare

Shield - Rare

Berserker - Uncommon

Elemental Mastery - Uncommon

Stealth - Rare

Dual Wield - Rare

Power Strike - Uncommon

Backstab - Uncommon

Evasion - Uncommon

Archery - Rare

Haste - Uncommon

Festering Touch - Common

Death Magic - Uncommon

Conceal - Epic

Regeneration - Rare

Armored Warrior - Rare

Intimidation - Rare

Dark Magic - Rare

Rampage - Rare

Weakness - Rare

Demonic Magic - Rare

Demonic Summoning - Rare

Demonic Teleportation - Epic

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The four of them stood there smiling, ignoring the expression on Everett's face.

"You couldn't help yourselves, could you?"

As one they burst out laughing, shaking their heads.

"We only killed about a hundred or so," Fowl said. It's not like we felt we were in danger."

"You hear that Everett? Not in danger," Tom said, a frown on his face since they announced what they had done. "It's not like the tower can be that dangerous."

"It really wasn't that bad, considering what else we've faced," Max replied. "I mean, those new lizardmen weren't that special."

"Did other groups see you fighting?"

Tanila shook her head in response to Everett's question. "We didn't notice anyone, but then again, the tower floor is massive and we wanted to see how long it took to reach ten percent of that first level."

Everett began to cough, and Tom groaned.

"Ten percent?! You are each ten percent into level one of the tower?!"

Tom's tone as he spoke made Max wince a little. "We are. Is that a bad thing?"

"How often did those little gems like the one I gave you drop?" Everett asked, rubbing his eyes with his fingers.

"Almost every time?" Batrire replied, glancing at Tanila, who nodded in confirmation.

"Almost every time?" Everett asked again, cocking his head slightly as one eyebrow rose.

"Yes…" Max answered, able to tell from his tone this wasn't the normal drop rate.

"That's impossible," Tom muttered. "Everett, you and I both know that's not possible… not ever."

The older man ran his hand through his white hair and nodded.

"Ok, listen up, you four," the Faction leader said, his tone and demeanor changing in an instant as he stopped leaning against the arm of the couch. "Do not share that information with anyone, and I repeat, anyone. Your newest member will be here tomorrow, and when you meet her she will learn a few things. You can trust her to keep them a secret. But if you tell others about the speed at which you gain those crystals any hope of hiding in the shadows will be gone."

Everett pointed his finger at Tanila and frowned. "Do you know how the gems work and what they do?"

She nodded.

“And what happens every ten levels worth of tower experience?”

“You mean how that specific gem won’t work anymore?” Tanila replied.

“Not just that, but also the other thing you can do once you reach level ten?” Everett asked with a grin.

Her eyes went wide as she looked at Everett and Tom, seeing both of them smiling about knowing something she didn’t.

Clearing his throat and taking a deep breath, Everett finally explained what he was holding back for a moment. “Normally, I would encourage most tower climbers never to attempt what I’m about to suggest but based on the…” He paused and looked at Tom for a second before returning his gaze to the four of them. “The very *generous* rate at which these gems are dropping, you can attempt something most shouldn’t.”

“That’s because it's stupid after the first ten levels,” Tom interjected when Everett went silent for a moment.

“Yes, he is right. Remember there are two different levels I’m talking about here. One is the actual level of the tower floor. The other is experience gained specifically through the gems. Now, for every ten levels of tower experience you can return here and decrease your tower level by ten–”

“Why would we do that?” Fowl interrupted.

“I’m trying to explain, if you’ll give me a moment,” Everett scowled at the dwarf. “Each tower level grants you a one percent bonus to all your stats. You still level normally, albeit much slower, but when you reach level ten in the tower, you gain a ten percent bonus of your base stats. By trading all that experience at the skill shard, you can permanently get two point five percent bonus stat points and regain those lost levels once more.”

Max and Fowl both whistled at the same time.

“So if you did that for the first stage of the tower, it would be twelve point five percent bonus?” Tanila asked, making sure she understood what Everett was describing.

He nodded and grinned. “Many do attempt this, but most quit after they realize the amount of time it takes to farm the materials once more.”

Tom shook his head and grunted. “Most don’t ever try it because they can’t stand the idea of giving up ten percent of their bonus stats. For some tower climbers that number gets massive quickly.”

Max nodded, wondering how everything was going to work with the ring he had.

“If you four… soon to be five,” Everett corrected himself, “manage to do that two, three or even four times, you could gain a major bonus in the same amount of time or even quicker than most.”

“What is the normal drop rate of gems?” Batrire asked.

“One out of three,” Tom replied.

“Holy elf tits!” Fowl cursed, his eyes going wide.

“Can someone get this dwarf a topless elf healer so we can move past that phrase?” Tanila said, glaring at Fowl.

“Ignore them. Realistically, how hard would it be to do that for forty levels?” Max asked.

Frowning, Everett shrugged. “I can’t answer that for the four of you; you’ll have to figure that out for yourselves. The real problem comes down to –”

The room they were in suddenly shook, and a deafening noise came from underneath them. Everett and Tom glanced at each other for a second before both took off to the office door. Max and the others ran behind them, not sure where they were headed but knowing something big must have happened.

“In the crafting area!”

Everett was moving faster than Max could have imagined. While his gray hair might fool some, Max knew their Faction leader had been a tower climber. Tom and Everett were bounding over ledges, landing on the floor below, and sprinting downstairs, each with the grace of someone half their age and stronger than he was.

As Max made his way down the stone stairs where the two men had disappeared, smoke began to flood the top of the hallway. He stayed low, covering his mouth with his shirt as he ran. He was able to hear the commotion before he saw it.

Groans and cries of pain rang out in the hallway, and Max caught up to where Tom had paused, trying to help a dwarven woman. Her arm was gone and she was covered in blood, yet the skin over the stump of her shoulder was growing back together and the massive gash across her face was closing.

“Rest Grabumnda.” Tom said, trying to comfort her.

“My arm!”

“It’s gone. Just rest.”

Max grimaced, seeing the dwarven woman panicking at the knowledge she had lost an arm, ignoring the fact she was only alive because Tom had saved her.

More shouts came and Max followed the sounds of screams as his sonar let him witness the destruction in the midst of the smoke.

“Tanila! Air!” he shouted as he made out two dead bodies on the floor. Both were mangled and one had its head crushed.

A wall was partially destroyed on the left, and stones were scattered everywhere. The thick metal door that had been in it was gone, partially embedded in the opposite wall.

“Tom!”

Max followed the sound of Everett’s voice, choking a little bit on the smoke but not wanting to give up on helping if he could.

Darting down the hall into a room where the entire left wall was almost gone, Max saw and sensed the chaos around him.

Whatever the workshop had been used for, it was now destroyed. There was a huge, four-foot hole in the back where an exhaust system of some kind had funneled fumes outside. A massive stone table was shattered and embedded in the floor, ceiling and the walls that were still standing. Body parts littered the room, or pieces of body parts. Max was unable to tell who or what they had come from.

“Tom!”

Everett’s shout came from deeper in the carnage and Max sensed Tom running past him with his sonar. The tone of their Faction leaders shout was a call for obvious help.

Following the rushing man, Max paused at the scene he saw. The explosion in the main room had destroyed half of the wall leading to it. As he entered the room, this one caused his heart to sink.

“It’s no good,” Everett said quietly.

Max could hear the conversation as he approached, sensing just how bad what Everett and Tom were looking at.

“Do… it… please…”

Max arrived next to the two men, who were standing over a male dwarf. He hated to see what his sonar had already told him. All four of the dwarf’s limbs were missing. Tom and Everett were both wrapping what Max knew were magical bandages on the nubs of the dwarf, stopping the blood that was squirting out.

A massive piece of metal had impaled the dwarf’s chest, and blood seeping out of the wound slowly. Not a single hair was left on his burnt body.

“We can save you!” Tom implored. “Let us save you Baldin!”

The dwarf coughed and winced, blood squirting from around the metal.

“I’m useless… this be no life… end me… please…”

Tom and Everett were both wincing and frowning as Max watched tears run down their faces.

End him… put him out of his mercy.

Grabbing his chest, Max felt the desire inside him, the pain of it all overwhelming him.

They won’t… they can’t because they care for him… that one is like Tanila… could you do that to her?

Shouts and calls for help came all around but Max realized that the voice inside him was right. Those two men looked at this dwarf with affection. He could not finish off Tanila if she were in the same situation.

Without hesitating, Max moved to the dwarf's head while pulling a knife from his inventory.

“I’ll do it. I’ll end your pain.”

Everett and Tom’s heads immediately jerked up, looking at Max as tears ran down their faces, leaving trails in the ashes that covered their faces.

“You can’t,” Tom whispered, pain filling his voice.

“Either you do it or I do. To make him suffer is worse.”

Tom could only shake his head, and Max turned to look at Everett, whose hand trembled as he reached for the knife.

“Let me… I’ll bear this pain. Just hold your friend,” Max said, putting the knife between the dwarf’s burnt lips. “Stab me, turn your head, and I’ll end it.”

A grunt came from the dwarf as he bit down on the hilt in pain. A tear traveled down his charred face as Baldin used all the strength he had left to plunge the dagger into Max’s outstretched hand. It pierced his hand completely, surprising Max for a moment as the dwarf flashed red.

Taking the knife from the dwarf’s mouth, he gave the dwarf a small nod and a smile.

“I’ll see you two… on the other side…”

Max held the knife over the dwarf’s eye, and after Baldin had closed them both, he plunged it into the dwarf’s brain causing a single shake of his torso before he went still.

Cold power flooded through Max, and he trembled at the sensation it had brought. Like a man who hadn’t drunk in days, he felt a thirst he had forgotten.

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Would you like to learn [Weapon Crafting]?]

[Yes / No]

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Would you like to learn [Armor Crafting]?]

[Yes / No]

Max blinked as he saw the notification.

The sobs of the two men forced his attention back to the situation at hand. Everett sat there, a hand on the burnt chest of Baldin’s body while Tom cried softly.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Max said as he stood, pulling the dagger from where he had plunged it.

Tom didn’t acknowledge him, leaning over the burnt and bloody remains with a wail coming from his mouth.

As Max started to move past Everett, a hand reached out and caught him.

Glancing, their eyes met.

“Thank you.”

Max nodded, seeing someone who in a moment would be on his feet fulfilling the obligations required by his role and, right now, unable to mourn the loss of someone dear to him.

“Baldin was fortunate to have you two.”

Those words felt harder to say than Max had imagined they would be. Knowing that, if that was one of his family, there was no way he could have done what he did.

He held out a hand, and when Everett took it to climb to his feet, Max saw the man wipe away one last tear before his face became like flint.

Then Everett was gone, turning on his heel and shouting orders, doing the job required of his position.

Mercy and growth… the gods are kind are they not?

Ignoring the voice in his head, Max made for his team.

He could address the notifications later.

164 - A Ranger Joins The Party[164 - A Ranger Joins The Party - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

One of my favorite Royal Road stories just hit amazon! Give Miles some love and check out this amazing masterpiece. Someday I hope to be able to write half as well as he does! Bog Standard Isekai: Scarred - A LitRPG Isekai Adventure https://www.royalroad.com/amazon/B0D3S8Q2SB

Sitting in the tub and holding Tanila close, Max closed his eyes, trying to let the memories of the last four hours fade away.

“You ok?” Tanila asked, softly kissing his hands while watching the steam rise from the water.

“No… I did… I did what needed to be done, but I don’t know if it was for the right reason.”

She frowned, nodding her head once. “Like Everett, sometimes the actions required of you aren’t easy. Would you still have done it if you had not possessed your skill?”

“Of course, but–”

“Then don’t dwell on it anymore,” Tanila said, not letting Max dwell on his frustration. “Move on. We have a big day tomorrow, and I will certainly not waste this moment alone with you.”

She spun, laying her chest against his as her wet red hair ran everywhere behind her in the tub.

“Do you think Everett or Tom would waste another moment after what they saw today?”

Max sighed and shook his head.

“Then take what you can get. Death is always close.”

Forcing a smile, Max kissed her forehead while running his fingers through her hair.

Later, lying in bed, Max listened to Tanila breathing next to him while staring at the two notifications, waiting for his attention.

He selected yes for both and felt the knowledge flood his mind.

[Skill Description - Weapon Crafting]

*****

Weapon Crafting- Legendary Skill: The user may craft weapons that will be known throughout the ages, provided materials are available for such a feat. The weapon crafted has four chances to gain additional stats or skills, each one having a base sixty percent chance of success.

During crafting, the user has a thirty percent chance to bestow the weapon with an element if the core required is present. May attempt a second elemental imbuing with a twenty percent chance of success.

Weapons crafted by the user of this skill will always be unable to injure their maker. Weapons crafted will be indestructible except by weapons, skills, or spells of Godly grade. The time required to craft a weapon depends on the materials used. The weapon may be crafted in stages and stored within dimensional pockets to prevent degradation of the process.

*****

Max froze, staring at the skill grade.

Legendary… impossible… for that to happen…

[Skill Description - Armor Crafting]

*****

Armor Crafting- Rare Skill: The user may craft standard armor of exceptional quality. Armor crafted has a twenty percent chance of acquiring two different stats. Armor has a five percent chance of being considered indestructible. Materials used may aid in the chance of creating higher-grade armor. Armor may be stored for one week in dimensional storage during the crafting process without any degradation.

*****

Two crafting skills?!

Max's head began to swirl as he lay there, trying not to wake up Tanila. Neither of those was something he had ever considered having, and now that he did, it created a lot of problems he couldn't easily solve.

How can I even use these? I doubt Everett would look the other way if I suddenly started crafting...

Unable to fathom what this meant, the timing of it all.

"I present to you four, Cordellia."

Max and the others moved across the room to offer their hands to the elf woman, who stood four inches taller than Tanila.

"I'm Seth, and this is Fowl, Batrire, and Tanila," Max announced.

The woman nodded and smirked as she shook his hand and then repeated it with the rest.

"An odd group, to say the least, though I am fascinated at the prospect of joining you four based on the information Everett has shared with me."

Max was able to keep a straight face, but Fowl started to giggle like a schoolgirl.

"Is something funny?" Cordellia asked, glaring at Fowl, who received an elbow to his ribs from Batrire.

"Ignore him," Tanila muttered. "He's a dwarf who has a fascination with holy elf tits and more."

Cordellia shrugged and frowned. "I've been around enough dirty-mouthed dwarves. I can put up with one more."

"I'm sorry… just your voice–" another elbow from Batrire cut him off.

Sighing, Cordellia nodded. "Yes… my voice… the one that Thuyja herself decided I should have. Are you laughing because of how high it is? Perhaps we should get a ruler and see if Ockrim cursed you, like every other dwarf, where the beard grows."

Batrire and Tanila started howling with laughter while Max kept quiet, staying out of the current conversation for as long as he could.

Turning a light shade of red, Fowl filled his lungs and puffed out his chest. "If you desire a gander, you are more than welcome to see what Ockrim has blessed me with."

"That's enough," Everett said, clapping his hands twice. "We're not here to see anything like that. You four know why Cordellia is here, and she knows why I have picked her to be in your party. Now then, is there anything else you need to know?"

"I got a question," Cordellia stated as she shifted her gaze to Tanila and stared at her for a moment. "Have you all actually killed multiple rare spawns?"

Fowl snorted as Tanila nodded. "We have."

Grunting, the archer turned away and shook her head, shrugging her shoulders at Everett. “All I got to do is not share anything I see and hope for another one?”

Everett grinned. “You really haven’t asked the most important question.”

“Which is?”

“How many we have killed,” Max answered for her. “At least four.”

“Holy elf tits!” Cordellia cursed, sending Fowl into a fit of laughter. She stared at everyone except the dwarf, who couldn’t stay upright, and saw all three of them nodding. “You’re telling me the four of you have killed at least four!?”

“It’s more than that, but we won’t get into an exact number,” Tanila replied. “The truth is, we need a fifth for obvious reasons. We’d prefer a damage dealer who understands our need to keep some things secret. None of us,” Tanila said as she motioned to the rest of the party, “want our names to be well known. We’ll share loot evenly, give you a turn with random loot, and treat you like family. All we care about is someone who can keep our secrets.”

“Hell, for a shot at the luck you four seem to have I’d cut my own tongue out,” Cordellia replied.

Sighing, Everett closed his eyes for a moment as he grimaced. “Let’s not go that far. Now, she is level fifty-four and almost level five for tower experience. She has a very strong skill set as long as you don’t need her to lock a creature down. For her level, her damage is hard to ignore.”

Cordellia grinned, nodding at Everett's praise. “Don’t forget, I’ve been in the tower for a while, so I’ll be useful. There's nothing like having an experienced person by your side.”

Glancing at the others, Max held up a thumb and watched as everyone else raised theirs in agreement.

“Welcome to the team,” Fowl said quickly. “Can you do just one thing for me?”

Raising an eyebrow, their newest member looked at Fowl, uncertain of what the request would be. “It depends… dare I ask?”

Batrire groaned as Fowl moved away from her quickly.

“Can you curse one more time?”

Max waited as everyone else left the room and headed for the gate to catch a quick carriage.

“You ok?” Max asked.

“No, but I don’t have the luxury of being like Tom. For all the hard-ass facade he puts on, this crushed him and… thank you for what you did… I couldn’t, and neither could Tom.”

“Had it been Tanila, I couldn’t have done it either. It was the least I could do.”

Everett nodded and sighed. “Baldin and I have known… knew each other for a long time. Tom didn’t care about our relationship and never treated me as less than a friend. Those two were like brothers. Sometimes, I swear…”

Everett trailed off as a single tear managed to win as he battled against his emotions.

“Sometimes they made my life hell, but I never doubted they would have my back. I see that with your group, and if you give Cordellia a chance, perhaps she might be the same.”

Max nodded, motioning to the door with his thumb. “I need to go, but I’m here if you ever need me. No one should be alone.”

“Seth, you’re different from most adventurers I’ve dealt with, and I still haven’t figured you out,” Everett stated as he started walking toward the door. “Most want power or money, men or women. You… you don’t seem concerned about it, even though I know you’re stronger than you’ll ever tell me… the fact you four actually got both the dragon and demon bonus proves that Dexic was right about you. She could sense it.”

Laughing, Max just shrugged. “Maybe one day I’ll be able to beat her.”

Everett erupted with laughter, shaking his head from side to side.

Opening the door, the Faction leader managed to stop laughing and took a deep breath.

“The day you defeat her is the day I’ll grant you a privilege she currently alone has.”

“Sounds like a deal,” Max stated as he walked toward the stairs.

“So, you want to tell me how you all work together, or just let me figure out things?”

Everyone glanced at Max, and he shook his head.

“Cart’s protected from listening?”

Tanila nodded.

“How many skills do you have?” Max asked Cordellia.

The large elf shifted for a moment as she sat next to Batrire on the seat.

“Four… you?”

“About the same, but mine are not like yours, and trust me when I say our party isn’t like most. The skills the four of us possess aren’t ones most have.”

“That’s a pile of ogre crap for an answer,” she replied, scowling at his response.

“Seth is right,” Tanila said. “I started with elemental mastery on my awakening day.”

Cordellia’s eyes popped open so fast that Max was worried for a moment that one might fall out. Her face scrunched up, and then she shook her head. “That’s a really

rare combination, and I’m pretty certain it's only happened once in our kingdom, and if that were true…”

As their archer’s voice trailed off, Tanila waved her hand over her wrist, her bracelet appearing. When her hair turned gold and her eyes shifted, Cordellia fell to the cart floor, putting her face and body in the tight space.

“Forgive me, Your Highness! I will not say a word! I swear on my life!”

Max frowned at Tanila, knowing they had discussed using this card, but he didn’t want to if they didn’t have to.

“Rise, Cordellia, you do not need to bow like that.”

The woman glanced up, watching Tanila’s hair and eyes change colors, their glow having vanished.

“But why? Why be here and…”

She took Max in, and then she cursed. “Goblin shite! You’re not seriously in love with a human, are you?”

Max winced when Tanila responded. The tone in her voice was one he hoped never to have directed at him.

“Cordellia, I will show you mercy this one time for that insult, but make no mistake,” Tanila declared, leaning toward the woman still on the floor, “if I ever hear you mock or belittle our relationship like that again, I will end your life in a moment. I swear this by the crown on my father’s head.”

The tanned elven woman’s face went a shade of white Max never knew existed as she bowed her head and nodded frantically.

“Now then,” Tanila continued, her voice back to normal. "If we are done discussing who I choose to associate with, perhaps we can find a way for you to act like someone I like until you earn my respect.”

Cordellia lifted her head slightly and saw that Tanila was smiling at her.

“Please get up and sit. I don’t need people to wonder why you’re groveling at my feet.”

As if flung by a magical force, Cordellia moved quickly and flattened herself against the edge of the cart.

Max leaned forward and smiled. “Cordellia, we really want this to work, and I promise you, I’ll protect you just like I do everyone here.”

The brown-haired elf nodded slowly, tension releasing from her body until she sat normally.

“It’s okay, dear,” Batrire said, patting the archer on the leg. “Tanila surprised all of us like that also. Seth is right; we’ll all treat you like one of us. Just try to act normal. I can’t stand having Seth grovel at her feet, and another one would be harder to deal with.”

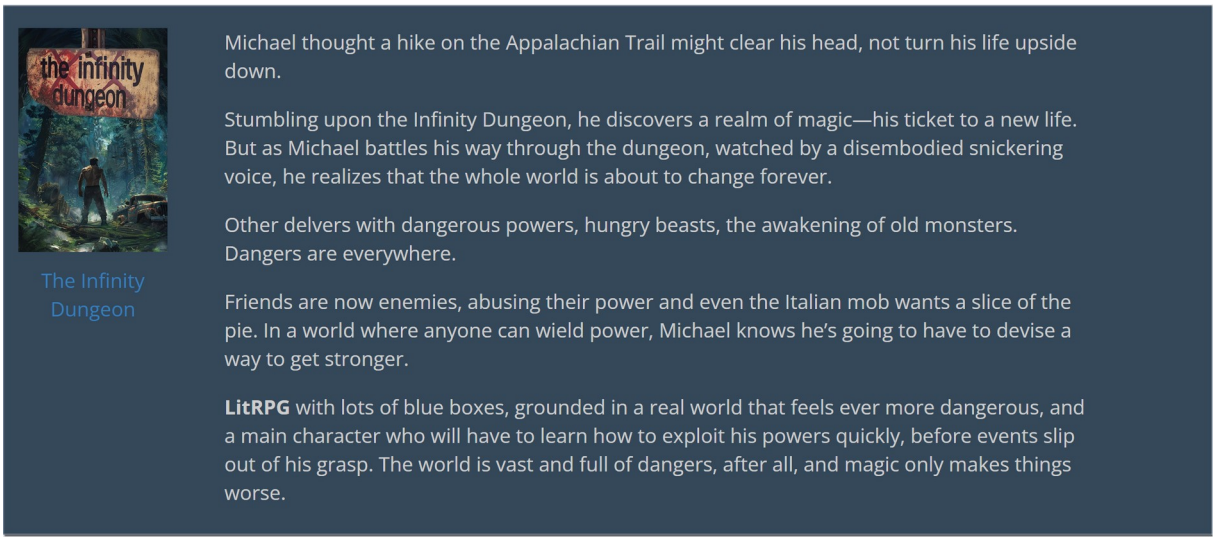
Tanila groaned and shook her head.

“Let’s talk strategy,” Max said, trying to change the topic. “Here’s what we do.”

165 - Rare Spawn Fun[165 - Rare Spawn Fun - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

[165 - Rare Spawn Fun - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG ((Book 3 Stubs June 30th!! Hits Amazon July 1st!)) | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


the infinity dungeon
The Infinity Dungeon
Michael thought a hike on the Appalachian Trail might clear his head, not turn his life upside down.
Stumbling upon the Infinity Dungeon, he discovers a realm of magic—his ticket to a new life. But as Michael battles his way through the dungeon, watched by a disembodied snickering voice, he realizes that the whole world is about to change forever.
Other delvers with dangerous powers, hungry beasts, the awakening of old monsters. Dangers are everywhere.
Friends are now enemies, abusing their power and even the Italian mob wants a slice of the pie. In a world where anyone can wield power, Michael knows he’s going to have to devise a way to get stronger.
LitRPG with lots of blue boxes, grounded in a real world that feels ever more dangerous, and a main character who will have to learn how to exploit his powers quickly, before events slip out of his grasp. The world is vast and full of dangers, after all, and magic only makes things worse.

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/86601/the-infinity-dungeon-launching-june-1st

“Nice work!” Max shouted as he spun back to face Cordellia behind him. “You do put out some damage out with that bow!”

Cordellia blushed a little, still struggling with the knowledge that one of the elven princesses was in her party.

“Are you all aware that gems don’t normally drop like this?” Cordellia asked. “I mean usually it’s one or two at most for a normal pack of five.”

“Everett told us,” Tanila replied. “Another thing we like to keep a secret.”

Nodding quickly, Cordellia smiled and pointed in the direction they were headed. “You all really think the rare spawn might be up there?”

Max shrugged. “We need to level up and kill stuff anyways. Why not aim for the special ones? Especially if we are going to try and reset our tower level every chance we get.”

Cordellia had no response other than to bob her head.

“Pack of five up ahead, we ready?”

“I am,” Tanila replied. “Same plan? Root one, freeze other, blast third, you two each tank and kill one while we watch Cordellia pincushion the other two?”

“Sounds good to me,” Fowl replied.

“You all are crazy,” Cordellia muttered. “I mean… I’ve been in a few groups but you four act like this isn’t anything. Most new tower climbers would be struggling.”

“We’re not most people,” Batrire replied sweetly. “Ready here!”

“Pulling!” Fowl shouted.

The pack of five lizardmen came rushing at them, each holding a spear and a shield.

Tanila rooted the furthest one and then Ice Prisoned the next one in line.

Cordellia immediately started firing arrows, already hitting her target twice before the other lizardmen were crowd controlled. As Fowl rushed toward the final two, his aura forced them to target him, Max came up from behind, choosing not to reveal his Stealth skill yet. Two quick strikes killed the first one and within a few more moments the second was also dead.

Tanila and Cordellia had finished off their original targets and the first lizardman that had been ensnared was already on the receiving end of arrow after arrow.

Less than a minute later the last two were dead.

“Seems so easy after having been just the four of us,” Fowl joked as he collected the gems that had dropped from the back two.

“How did most of your fights go?” Max asked Cordellia. “Similar to this?”

She shook her head, frowning for a moment. “We had one mage, a healer, two tanks and me. Yet at no point did anyone do the damage that you and Pri… Tanila are doing. I don’t doubt we can easily reach the fourth floor without a problem.”

“Let’s take our time and keep working together to get all the kinks out,” Max suggested as he pointed at the next pack in their path. “I’d rather know we have things down and know how to respond if something goes wrong instead of finding out the hard way we aren’t prepared.”

Cordellia bobbed her head.

“Let’s go!” Fowl shouted as he moved ahead of the others.

The next two hours was a steady stream of cutting down packs with relative ease and no problems. Even when the very rare resist came against one of Tanila’s spells, Max picked up the one that resisted while everyone else focused the others, letting Fowl continue to easily tank the lizardmen, who continued to hurt themselves every time they hit him.

“Holy elf tits,” Cordellia cursed, sending Fowl into a fit of laughter.

“I take it that's the rare spawn?” Max asked, ignoring their dwarf warrior and his childlike behavior.

“Yes, and I’ve never seen it before, but I know what it looks like… I mean… this isn’t possible.”

Shrugging, Max studied the group with the rare spawn and considered their options.

“So the boss is twice as tall, meaning what… fifteen or sixteen feet?”

“At least,” Fowl replied, having recovered from his laughing fit. “Does it really have a spear and a shield?”

“That shield is taller than you are Fowl,” Batrire teased. “The spear is taller than it is… how are you going to fight that reach?”

“Two archers in that group,” Max pointed out. “How fast can you two drop them?”

“As long as the big one doesn’t aggro on me, I should be fine killing the first one before it gets more than one shot off. I’ll use my skill on it.”

Max nodded. “The ten minute cooldown one?”

“Yeah, but it will easily kill it. If I hit the boss with it Fowl would have to taunt right after.”

“Don’t worry about using that on the boss. We’ll manage fine,” Max replied. “Tanila, you want to root the other two and then burn down the last archer?”

“Works for me,” she replied.

“Uh… Seth, aren’t we going to talk about that massive spear? I mean the metal head of that weapon is at least as thick as Batrire.”

Unable to help it, Max chuckled and nodded. “It is… so don’t get hit with it.”

Groaning, Fowl gave Max the finger before pulling a rock out of his storage.

“Ready here,” their dwarf warrior muttered.

“You all aren’t worried about any skills it might have?” Cordellia blurted out as Fowl started to rotate his shoulders.

“We’ll be fine, provided it doesn’t kill Fowl in one shot,” Batrire replied.

“Pulling!”

Fowl’s rock hit the boss, and Max couldn’t help but chuckle at the dwarf's ability to strike a target that big from seventy yards away.

The boss roared and raced toward them, quickly leaving its allies behind as each step ate up the distance with ease.

Cordellia’s shot flew over the cracked stone floor and put a hole through the archer on the left’s chest, killing it as it drew back its bow.

The two melee lizardmen were locked in place and soon a large ice spear impaled the remaining archer that was shooting at Cordellia who dodged its arrows with ease.

Max saw the boss coming. Its body looked like a mountain of muscle. Its scales were thicker than the other lizardmen’s and Max wondered what difference it would make in getting through its defenses.

The boss’s spear glowed red and came at Fowl the moment it was in range.

Holding his shield out, Fowl braced for what was coming.

A loud clashing of metal on metal rang out across the area and Fowl was sent flying, tumbling across the ground while the boss roared in agony.

Max watched as his friend's health bar dropped half way, surviving the creature's strike and dealing back a percentage of the damage it had caused.

His own weapon flashed red as he ran forward, and hacked at the boss’s left leg.

His halberd went halfway through the creature's leg, hitting the bone, when the boss’s body flashed yellow and the weapon got lodged in place.

It hissed, swinging its spear in an arc and bringing the long shaft toward Max. He felt it coming and twisted sideways as he let go of his weapon’s shaft, and moved to stand next to the boss’s leg.

Another roar sounded when the boss’s shield connected with Max’s weapon shaft as it tried to squash him. The force of the blow sent Max’s weapon flying and blood started squirting from the wound.

“It’s shielded!” Cordellia shouted, her arrows exploding upon impact with the boss’s scales.

“Coming!” Fowl shouted from behind, still over fifteen meters away.

The boss stomped at Max, its injured leg seemingly unhindered even as it bled from the gash. He ducked and weaved, moving toward his weapon that lay a few yards away, almost closing his eyes as the spear came at him. Each strike from the boss was easy to read and dodge. It tried to stab, smack and bash Max with its spear and shield, but missed each attack.

Dirt and stone flew up as the spear impaled the ground next to Max, missing him by less than a foot as he stepped sideways at the last second.

Like a fool, Max grabbed the spear, wanting to test something, and found himself airborne a second later when the boss yanked it back.

“Elllllfffff tiiiiitssss!” Max howled as the boss waved its spear around in the air, trying to dislodge the human clinging to it for dear life.

A quick flash of yellow came as Cordellia fired off a charge shot, hitting the boss in its right eye, causing it to roar in pain as Fowl finally reached it, slamming his shield into the weakened leg.

The boss staggered for a moment and lowered its weapon enough that Max could let go, rolling as he hit the ground.

“Careful!”

The massive rare spawn slammed its shield down towards Fowl, who held his own shield above his head. It was angled just enough that the boss’s attack ricocheted off to the side, and sent Fowl rolling a few feet when most of the power from the strike was displaced.

Max raced to his weapon as Cordellia began unleashing arrow after arrow at the boss.

“Almost done with the warriors!” Tanila shouted.

Fowl’s thorn aura was taking a toll on the boss as every hit that he blocked or suffered reflected damage back, so blood was seeping from cracks in its scales.

“Coming!” Max yelled, halberd in hand and charging toward the massive lizardman struggling to attack.

Cordellia’s constant barrage of arrows aimed at its face required it to hold the shield upward, limiting its ability to stop Fowl’s hammer, which always connected when there was an opening.

Max ran toward the left leg, planted both feet, and swung, connecting in the same spot as before and fracturing the bone. This caused the lizardman to stumble, and when it stepped sideways. Putting all its weight on its left leg, the bone broke completely.

“Timber!” Fowl yelled as he tried to dodge the falling mass of the creature.

Arrows peppered the right leg and hip that were exposed, puncturing the scales in an impressive show of power.

“Incoming rock!”

Max had rolled out of the way as the lizardman fell toward him and saw the massive boulder Tanila had created come crashing on the boss’s back.

Bones crunched under the impact and scales burst apart, as the boss was smashed between the hard stone floor and Tanila's spell.

Knowing its life was coming to an end, Max leaped up the moment the spell ended, landing on the boss's back and jabbing the tip of his spear into its smashed head.

Scales shattered, yet Max couldn’t pierce through its skull on his first attempt.

It tried to stand, pushing up with both hands, and Max used every ounce of skill and ability to reamain upright, jabbing the tip of his halberd down again and again.

As a hand reached toward him Max thrust once more, finally shattering the thick skull, and his weapon plunged deep inside the boss’s head, connecting with the brain and ending its life.

The rare spawn fell back to the ground, with Max holding onto his halberd as he was slung forward and the cold rush of power filled him.

[6 Strength Consumed]

[6 Constitution Consumed]

[Consume has Consumed a Higher Rank Skill]

[Power Strike - Uncommon has been upgraded to Power Strike - Epic]

[Consume has Consumed a Higher Rank Skill]

[Armored Warrior - Rare has been upgraded to Armored Warrior - Epic]

Max’s grip on his weapon was the only thing that kept him from falling off the boss’s body as the power from the stats and two skills upgrading to epic flooded through him.

Blinking his eyes, Max didn’t waste a second once his body and mind were working again, yanking his weapon free and jumping off the corpse.

“Hey, what are you–” Fowl called out, stopping when he saw Max pull the spear free from the boss’s hand and store it immediately.

“Start harvesting it!” Cordellia shouted as she ran toward the fallen body, bow put away and a knife that was almost as long as a short sword out in her hand.

The group descended upon the fallen rare spawn’s body, hacking off fingers, ears, plucking eyes and teeth while Max got to work cutting off as much of the tail as possible due to the thickness of it.

Less than a minute after they started, it began to fade, disappearing into the floor. Where it had been resting, a standard-size red boss chest appeared.

“Gods!” exclaimed Fowl as he watched the finger he had been trying to cut off vanish. “That went faster than I expected.”

Cordellia nodded. “Bosses here don’t last long. Most of the time a party might not get anything and they're just happy to have survived, let alone get close enough to try to cut through the protective skin or armor.” She turned and pointed at Max, who was hefting a huge six foot section of the tail he had managed to chop off over his head. “Nice work on the spear and that. I’m assuming you don’t have room for the tail?”

Tossing the tail to the ground, Max nodded. “I’m not certain the spear was a great choice. Perhaps I should have tried for its shield, but I have a few ideas of what I might want to use the weapon for.”

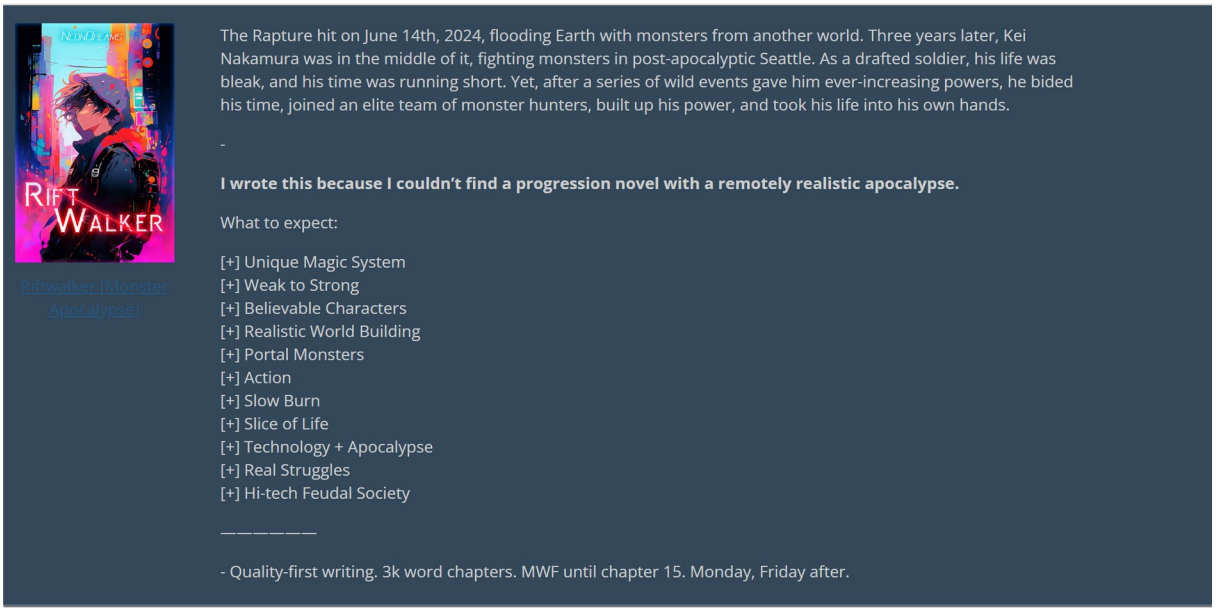
Everyone except Cordellia started to laugh and she glanced at them that, an eyebrow raised in wonder.

“Oh, don’t worry. You’ll find out soon enough,” Batrire replied. “For now, let's see what’s inside the chest.”

166 - First Chest in the Tower

166 - First Chest in the Tower - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


RIFT WALKER
Riftwalker [Monster Apocalypse]
The Rapture hit on June 14th, 2024, flooding Earth with monsters from another world. Three years later, Kei Nakamura was in the middle of it, fighting monsters in post-apocalyptic Seattle. As a drafted soldier, his life was bleak, and his time was running short. Yet, after a series of wild events gave him ever-increasing powers, he bided his time, joined an elite team of monster hunters, built up his power, and took his life into his own hands.
-
I wrote this because I couldn't find a progression novel with a remotely realistic apocalypse.
What to expect:
[+] Unique Magic System
[+] Weak to Strong
[+] Believable Characters
[+] Realistic World Building
[+] Portal Monsters
[+] Action
[+] Slow Burn
[+] Slice of Life
[+] Technology + Apocalypse
[+] Real Struggles
[+] Hi-tech Feudal Society
———————
- Quality-first writing. 3k word chapters. MWF until chapter 15. Monday, Friday after.
https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/87751/riftwalker-monster-apocalypse

They all turned to the chest, admiring how it was red like the scales of the rare spawn they had just defeated. Decorating the outside of the chest was a massive lizardman, its scales resembling the gems they collected from the normal creatures they killed.

“Any idea what’s inside?” Max asked Cordellia.

She shook her head and grinned, bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet. “You have no idea how excited I am right now.”

Fowl started to chuckle, but stopped when Batrire’s staff bonked him on the helm.

“I’m sorry… her voice… it’s just so high…”

“Batrire, do you mind if I kick Fowl somewhere to see if his voice can match mine?” Cordellia asked.

“Be my guest,” Batrire replied.

“Woah, now ladies! There's no need to get ugly!” Fowl protested, putting a hand down over his manhood and taking a step back.

Coughing, Max got their attention and pointed to the chest. “Cordellia, since it’s your first one, you can open it.”

She glanced at Max and the group, all smiling at her, each nodding. “You’re sure? I can?!”

“Welcome to the team,” Max replied, motioning for her to move forward.

Cordellia rushed over, not waiting to see if they were joking or giving them a chance to change their minds, and flung the box open.

“Hairy dwarf balls…” she muttered, her jaw going slack.

Max and the others quickly moved to see what might cause the woman to speak about such wonderful things.

“Damn, she’s right,” Fowl muttered in agreement, staring into the swirling purple storage.

“Is this common?” Cordellia asked. “I mean… a chest like this.”

Coughing to clear his throat, Max shrugged and flashed her a grin. “We have seen a few of these, but not many. I guess the real question is, are you ready to see what that is?”

Inside were five items along with a massive yellow crystal. A red bow, a red hammer, two sets of red earrings, and a pair of red-scaled boots waited to be claimed.

The archer’s hand trembled as she reached in and touched the bow, which immediately appeared in her hand. Cordellia pulled it back, admiring the length and thickness of it, and then her eyes went wide.

“Holy elf tits! It’s already identified!”

The group of four started to chuckle and grinned as Cordellia stared wide-eyed at her new bow.

“Going to share the stats or keep it a secret?” Tanila asked.

“Do you all do that?”

“Sometimes,” their mage replied with a shrug. “You can keep it a secret. It’s yours, and we don’t want you to feel like you have to tell us everything.”

Running her right hand along the bow, Cordellia was too busy admiring it to talk more.

“Guess that means I’m next,” Fowl said as he reached in and grabbed the mace. It was a four-sided mace. Each side had a two-inch spike, and there was a spike on top as well.

“I’d curse,” Fowl muttered, “but it seems unfair to do so… five strength and constitution and a bleed effect.”

“Damn, that’s nice!” Max exclaimed, slapping his dwarven friend on the back. “It’s a little longer, too, which is great with your short arms.”

“Aye, it never hurts to have a few more inches,” Fowl replied with a grin.

Both women groaned as they moved together, each taking a set of earrings from the chest. Both pairs were simple red studs, yet Max could see Batrire and Tanila’s reactions when they identified them.

“You two are staring awfully hard. Care to share?”

Batrire shook her head and grinned. “Not yet, maybe later. We’ll see if you can figure out what they do later.”

Max cocked his head but said nothing, nodding and waiting to see what Tanila was going to do.

“Batrire’s right… I’m going to hold off sharing this time.”

Not wasting any more time, Max took the yellow crystal and stored it, knowing it might help Everett feel better after the event from yesterday. He then claimed his boots from the chest and admired their feel as he watched it vanish into nothing.

[*Inspect Boots*]

*****

Boots of Strength

+10 Strength

Bonded

*****

“Wow…” Max said, trying to wrap his head around the number he saw as he considered what he was holding in his hands.

“Oh, goblin shite,” Fowl muttered. “If he’s using that tone of voice, it’s got to be broken.”

Max turned to stare at Cordellia, who was watching him. After a moment, he finally shook his head and frowned. “I’m going to ask a question, and I need an answer.”

The archer shifted slightly under Max’s gaze and gave a quick nod.

“What are the stats for most items in the tower? At what point do they increase, and how high can they go?”

Cordellia grimaced as she tried to figure out how to answer that question. “Are you saying from normal bosses or ones like what we just killed?”

“Say both?”

“The bow I was using… it was one I got from the Faction. Tom and Everett gave it to me to help be more of a contribution to your team,” Cordellia stated. “It had five dexterity on it, and to say I was ecstatic would be an understatement… the bow I just got…” She trailed off, still struggling to form words for something that seemed unbelievable.

“So your new bow is somewhere between an eight and a ten, with a possible bonus?” Max asked, grinning.

Her eyes went wide, jaw going slack for a moment before she nodded.

“Goblin shite,” Fowl cursed. “I knew he had something good.”

“How… how do you know?” Cordellia asked, oblivious to Fowl’s words.

“Remember, everything we say here is private and a secret,” Max said as he held up his boots. “These have no added perks besides giving me a plus ten to my strength.”

“Holy elf tits!” Batrire shouted, glancing at Max and then at Cordellia, who now seemed less in shock about what she was holding in her hands.

“You’re serious?” Tanila asked, knowing Max wasn’t lying but still needing to verify his statement.

Max nodded, a slight smirk on his face, as he kept his attention on their new archer.

“It has a bonus of eight to dexterity and a ten percent penetration bonus,” Cordellia said softly. “Something like this wouldn’t normally appear until after the twentieth floor, and even then… maybe not until the boss on the twenty-ninth floor. A bow like this… it should last until nearing the fortieth floor if what I’ve heard is true.”

Smiling, Max removed his old boots and began slipping on the new ones, immediately feeling their effects.

“Damn, that feels amazing,” Max stated, pulling out a backpack and placing his old boots in it.

Everyone was watching him, smiling as he stood up and stored his backpack.

“Please, I’m just saying.”

Batrire and Tanila laughed. Both started putting their earrings on while Max moved to collect the small gems that had dropped.

“Pri… Tanila, can I ask a question?”

Sighing, their mage nodded and turned to give Cordellia her full attention. “Go ahead.”

“How?”

“How what?” Tanila replied, grinning as she made the woman squirm a little.

“These drops… those spawns… it would take…” Struggling with her words, Cordellia finally got out what she was thinking. “Getting stuff like this would take a god's blessing.”

Bobbing her head, Tanila shrugged as she finished placing the second earring. “If you believe that then the real question is, if the gods are doing this and you are part of it, can they trust you with the task they have given us?”

Cordellia winced at that question, dealing with what Tanila figured was the real crux of the problem.

“Everett wants you to share things you learn, doesn’t he?”

Slowly, the ranger nodded.

“We are fine with that. We just don’t want everything about us shared. So you have a role in all this. Obviously, the gods are going to give you the same chance to be part of whatever task they have for us. You don’t have to choose to obey one and not the other. I’m always here if you’re not certain what to share.”

The taller elf sighed of relief as she watched Tanila treat her in a way she never anticipated one of the royal line doing. Dealing with that knowledge was hard enough, and seeing what had just happened left Cordellia obligations battling her desire to serve the elven line.

“Thank you,” Cordellia said, slightly bowing her head. “I swear I will always protect you and those you deem worthy of your friendship.”

Tanila moved forward and gently squeezed the archer on one of her arms.

Cordellia flinched for a moment before she relaxed and smiled.

“If you two are done playing nice,” Fowl called out, breaking the moment of bonding between the two of them, “it’s time to keep moving on.”

“He’s a bit of an arse, isn’t he?” Cordellia asked as they turned to move where the other three were waiting.

“Oh, you have no idea,” Tanila replied with a chuckle. “Give him time, though. He’s like the brother you wish you had, but don’t want coming over for dinner.”

Both elves laughed at a joke only the two of them would understand.

“You’re certain you want the first watch?”

Max nodded at Cordellia and pointed to the tent where everyone would be. “I’ve done it many times, and you need some rest. We got at least another day before we can hope to clear this floor.”

“Do you think someone might attack us? We should be safe from monsters.”

Shrugging, Max glanced around the small area near a stone cliff they setup camp against. The stone rose at least seventy meters, providing a safe spot for them to rest.

Not arguing anymore, Cordellia moved into the tent with the others while Max pulled out a stone he had picked up and set it down. He had positioned himself so that his Sonar skill encompassed the tent and the stone cliff.

Sitting down, Max decided to check how much of a difference his upgraded stats made.

[Skill Description - Power Strike]

*****

Power Strike - Epic Skill: The user's next melee attack will multiply their strength by 200% and inflict a critical injury. The skill has a thirty-minute cooldown between uses.

*****

[Skill Description - Armored Warrior]

*****

Armored Warrior - Epic Skill: When activated, the user's body will be covered in magical armor twice as strong as their current equipment for fifteen seconds. Resistances provided by equipment will also be doubled. Constitution is doubled for durability, and bonus hit points are consumed first. The ability cooldown is twenty-four hours.

*****

Damn... that is huge...

Max tried to imagine what a thirty-minute cooldown would be like on his Power Strike.

At Godly rank, would it be less than fifteen minutes?

Looking up at the dark sky with amazement at how the tower's first floor mimicked the time outside, Max tried to focus his mind on what the group had experienced today. Knowing whatever some god had done to the dungeons appeared to be working in the tower left Max concerned about how Cordellia would handle it. The improvement in gear was beyond anything he had imagined, and the only thing that concerned him was how strong that rare spawn had been.

Even with my boosted strength, that thing was way tougher than the other lizardmen. Not one of them had given me a single point of stats. This begs the question: How much stronger are these bosses and rare spawns going to get?

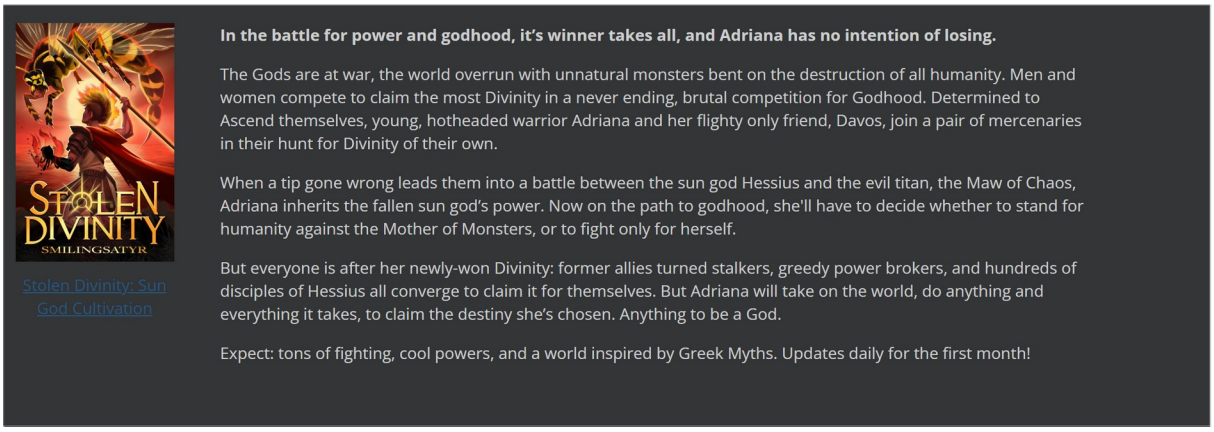
There were two spots to check tomorrow as they crossed the floor, hoping the other two rare spawns Everett had mentioned would be there. With no idea what they might run into, Max couldn’t help but smile.

Either way, he was going to get stronger here faster than he had imagined.

167 - It Only Gets Harder

167 - It Only Gets Harder - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


STOLEN DIVINITY
SMILINGSATYR
Stolen Divinity: Sun God Cultivation
In the battle for power and godhood, it's winner takes all, and Adriana has no intention of losing.
The Gods are at war, the world overrun with unnatural monsters bent on the destruction of all humanity. Men and women compete to claim the most Divinity in a never ending, brutal competition for Godhood. Determined to Ascend themselves, young, hotheaded warrior Adriana and her flighty only friend, Davos, join a pair of mercenaries in their hunt for Divinity of their own.
When a tip gone wrong leads them into a battle between the sun god Hessius and the evil titan, the Maw of Chaos, Adriana inherits the fallen sun god's power. Now on the path to godhood, she'll have to decide whether to stand for humanity against the Mother of Monsters, or to fight only for herself.
But everyone is after her newly-won Divinity: former allies turned stalkers, greedy power brokers, and hundreds of disciples of Hessius all converge to claim it for themselves. But Adriana will take on the world, do anything and everything it takes, to claim the destiny she's chosen. Anything to be a God.
Expect: tons of fighting, cool powers, and a world inspired by Greek Myths. Updates daily for the first month!

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/87757/stolen-divinity-sun-god-cultivator

“This seems so broken,” Cordellia muttered as they continued to plow their way through the first floor. “You all really have no idea how fast we are going compared to most, do you?”

Fowl shrugged and grunted. “We don’t talk about that anymore. That’s so pre-tower day stuff.”

Tanila started to laugh and gave Batrire a gentle shove as she groaned.

“Seriously though,” Cordellia continued. “We are destroying this place.”

“Maybe it's the new bow,” Tanila stated, their archer nodding.

After gathering the yellow gems, Max pointed at the spot on the map Everett had given him. “There might be a rare spawn up here around that bend in the stone cliffs. I’m pretty sure there will be at least two or three more packs before we reach it.”

“We taking bets if it's up?” Fowl asked as he moved next to Max.

Chuckling, Max shook his head. “Let’s just see what we find.”

“That seems ominous,” Max stated as he pointed at the pack right before the bend in the wall. “Four lizardmen holding staves with skulls and two warriors guarding them.”

“Those casters are a pain,” Cordellia said as she bent down, drawing her finger across the ground through the thin layer of dirt covering the stone. “The ones we faced earlier are weaker than these. Most people don’t come here unless they're looking for the rare spawn and they have a rogue.”

“Why a rogue?”

She looked up at Fowl, who had asked the question, and frowned. “They cast ice and fire magic pretty quickly. If you have to get close as a tank or warrior like Seth, you can end up dead without enough healing. The rogue can usually slip in and kill one or two while everyone else tries to take out the rest of the casters.”

“What kind of odds do we have with our group?” Tanila asked.

Cordellia drew lines in the dirt with indicators for each caster and the lizardmen warriors, making marks above each one.

“You and I can take out one each without too much trouble.” She chuckled for a second before continuing. “With my new bow, I’m certain I can one-shot the one on the left. That would then allow me to focus on the one next to it. You’d have to root the two warriors while Seth and Fowl charged, drawing their attacks. That leaves the one on the far right for you to burn down. Two spells, maybe three, and it should die.”

She stood up and shrugged. “After that, it would leave one caster left with two warriors unable to help.”

“So doable,” Max said, noticing Tanila staring at him.

“Easily. Batrire will just have to manage the healing.”

Max held his hand up in the air, opening and closing his fist a few times.

Tanila rolled her eyes and shook her head.

“Am I missing something?” Cordellia asked, glancing between the two.

“Yes, but you’ll find out soon enough,” Max replied, grinning at Tanila, who was scowling back at him.

“Charging!” Fowl shouted as he raced forward, shield ahead.

Max followed a few yards to the right of Fowl, using his shield as well. He had considered sneaking up to the mages but all the other ones in the dungeons had spotted him when he had tried.

The lizardmen shrieked, and as the two warriors started to rush forward roots began to ensnare the one on the right.

An arrow blazed past Fowl’s on the left, and connected with the caster’s head as its hands began to glow, causing it to explode in a shower of gore.

“Shite!” Fowl cursed as he ran.

The second warrior found itself encased in ice a moment later.

“Incoming!” Max shouted as three spells came toward them.

Two ice spells hit Fowl’s shield, shattering upon impact and slowing down the warrior's approach.

Max held his shield out as a fireball raced toward him. He felt the heat of it wash over him and was thankful for the lack of hair on his head that could be burnt away from it. The pain was minimal, not nearly as bad as Cordellia had led Max to believe it would be.

An ice spear passed Max, headed toward the mage on the far right.

He could see the last caster on the left struggling against Cordellia’s arrows, getting hit each time it stopped dodging to try and cast a spell.

Max raced past Fowl and leapt over the rooted lizardman, closing the distance in a flash to land in front of the last caster, who had almost finished casting a fireball.

His shield slammed into the lizard as the spell went off, bathing both of them in flames.

The caster was knocked on its back and slid a dozen yards before finding a blade in its chest.

[129 Hit Points Consumed]

Max couldn’t help but smile as he turned, seeing the other two casters both down. Fowl was braining the frozen warrior with his new weapon, no doubt smiling at getting to kill something.

Turning, Max ran back while storing his shield. Coming up behind the immobilized warrior, he struck its head off in one blow.

“Yeah, that’s not even funny,” Cordellia reiterated for the hundredth time.

“Let’s just stop bringing it up, then,” Batrire said. “We’ve already worked through this on our own. I’m not sure I can handle another twenty floors of that statement.”

Grunting, the elf nodded and handed Max the two gems she had picked up.

“So tell me what you see over there,” Max asked as he pointed at the pack of lizardmen in the opening they had fought their way to.

“Nothing that I haven’t seen at least once.”
“So no rare spawn?”

Cordellia shook her head.

Grunting, Max pointed at the last spot he had marked on the map. “Guess there’s one last spot to check.”

“Well, I’ll be an ogre’s uncle,” Fowl muttered. “Everett is going to blow a–”

A grunt from Batrire cut Fowl off.

“A… yeah, I got nothing if I can’t say that,” Fowl stated after trying to be funny.

“You four realize no one has confirmed this spawn actually being here for a hundred years?”

Max nodded, ignoring Cordellia’s expression as he studied the rare spawn standing within another long section of rock walls. The stone canyon was about a hundred

yards wide and three hundred yards deep, but even from the entrance the rare spawn was so tall there was no question of whether it was present.

“Does anyone have any idea what it is?” Batrire asked. “I can’t make it out from here.”

“It’s a caster,” Cordellia informed her. “At least as big as the other rare spawn we faced and carrying a staff just as tall as itself.”

“You can see that?” Batrire asked her, squinting as she tried to make out what Cordellia described.

“Our archer is right,” Tanila stated. “Whatever it is, it’s going to be casting something nasty. I can’t imagine what magic it has, but that boss’s spells will probably be close to mine in strength.”

“Give me options then. What can we do against it, and the three casters with it?”

Tanila and Cordellia both stood there silently, each considering possible options.

“I’m not sure my arrows will bother it enough to stop it from casting. The other mages will cause problems if we don’t do something to stop them.”

“So you focus on the mages, and we’ll focus on the rare spawn?”

“You seem awfully unconcerned about what *that* is,” Cordellia said as she pointed at the massive lizardman. “I mean, do you really have a plan?”

Max’s face revealed a devilish grin, and Fowl cursed when he saw it. “Gods protect me. I already know where this is going,” he grumbled.

“Tanila, you willing to use it now?”

The red-headed mage frowned as she nodded and began summoning her familiar.

Cordellia’s jaw almost hit the ground as she saw the ball of fire begin to float near Tanila.

“You… have an elemental… how…” Catching herself, Cordellia shook her head. “Never mind… I wouldn't be surprised if you pulled a wand out of your–”

Tanila’s glare cut off the archer, whose cheeks turned red for a moment.

“Okay, here’s the plan. Fowl charges and Cordellia kills one of the casters at the start. Tanila will cast a fireball and tell us when to go. From there, you two get the last casters dead and leave the rare spawn for Fowl to taunt.”

“What about you?” Fowl asked, frowning at being used for bait.

“You’ll see. Telling you now would ruin the fun.”

“Go!” Tanila shouted.

Fowl took off running, and after a few yards, Max began racing toward the boss with no weapon or shield in hand.

“Now!” Tanila told Cordellia, who used her skill, and fired an arrow that killed the caster on the left in a single shot. By then she was already sending an arrow at the one in the middle beginning to cast.

The fireball that was growing over Tanila’s head roared toward the rare spawn, emitting an orange light as it flew across the rocky terrain.

Fowl was pumping his legs as fast as he could, trying to prepare for what looked like something awful coming from the boss’s hands.

Max passed him on the right, a good thirty yards away, and Fowl tried to ignore the fact that his friend still had no weapon out.

The fifty yards between them and the boss disappeared quickly as Tanila’s fireball crashed into it. An explosion of fire erupted all around it, bathing both casters near it in flames.

Max couldn’t help but grin, seeing the boss struggle from the attack. The spell it was casting was not canceled, but it appeared to be delayed from being finished, the magical light shrinking for a moment.

Max began turning sideways, his mind and body already telling him what he needed to do as he pulled the massive spear from his inventory.

He held it at the very end, his right hand gripping the base and his left hand supporting as much of the shaft as he could.

Over eighteen feet of spear stuck out before him, and the angle at which he held it looked preposterous. He skipped a few steps before planting his left foot and letting his body rotate over it. The spearhead lined up with the boss, and as it did, his throwing skill combined with his weapon mastery skill told him exactly when to thrust with his right hand at the base of the spear.

It wasn’t as fast as the arrows Cordellia fired, but the massive weapon flew from his hand, angled perfectly toward the rare spawn to travel right into its chest.

Max smiled as he took two more steps to regain his balance, watching as his attack was about to impale the boss.

The spear impacted a glowing shield that suddenly became visible around the boss and exploded into pieces.

The spell it was casting took off, flying over their area and blanketing the sky above for fifty yards.

Massive chunks of ice, each one as big as a sword and just as sharp, began falling from the clouds in droves, raining down upon Fowl, Max, and the others.

“I need to get closer!” Batrire shouted, trying to dodge the frozen swords coming down around them. “I can’t heal from this far away!”

Max pulled his shield out and held it over his head, running through the downpour of ice that didn’t seem to be letting up while watching the boss begin to cast another spell.

Fowl reached one of the mages, bashing the one on the right as he ran by, crushing its leg and causing blood to come from its burnt skin.

Grabbing his halberd from storage, Max ran, trying to close the last twenty yards between him and the boss.

Reaching the boss's legs, Fowl swung his hammer, aiming for its feet, but his weapon bounced off whatever barrier was there. Thankfully, his weapon did not break as the spear had.

He swung once more, getting the same results, ignoring the massive blades of ice that assaulted him in his armor.

A smile appeared on the rare boss's face. It was the first time Max had ever seen a creature in the tower smirk like that.

Fowl cried out for a second, and then his body was encased in ice.

"FOWL!" Batrire shouted from across the field. The pain in her voice ate away at Max's soul.

Their dwarven warrior's health bar began to plummet.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

If you love me - Do me a favor and checkout my new story!

Battle Through the Nine Realms!

Even better, liking it or following it would be a massive boost!

Editing book 4 of UL1 as we prepare for book 3's Amazon launch Next month!

Also 100k+ words into book 5!! Man it is getting good!

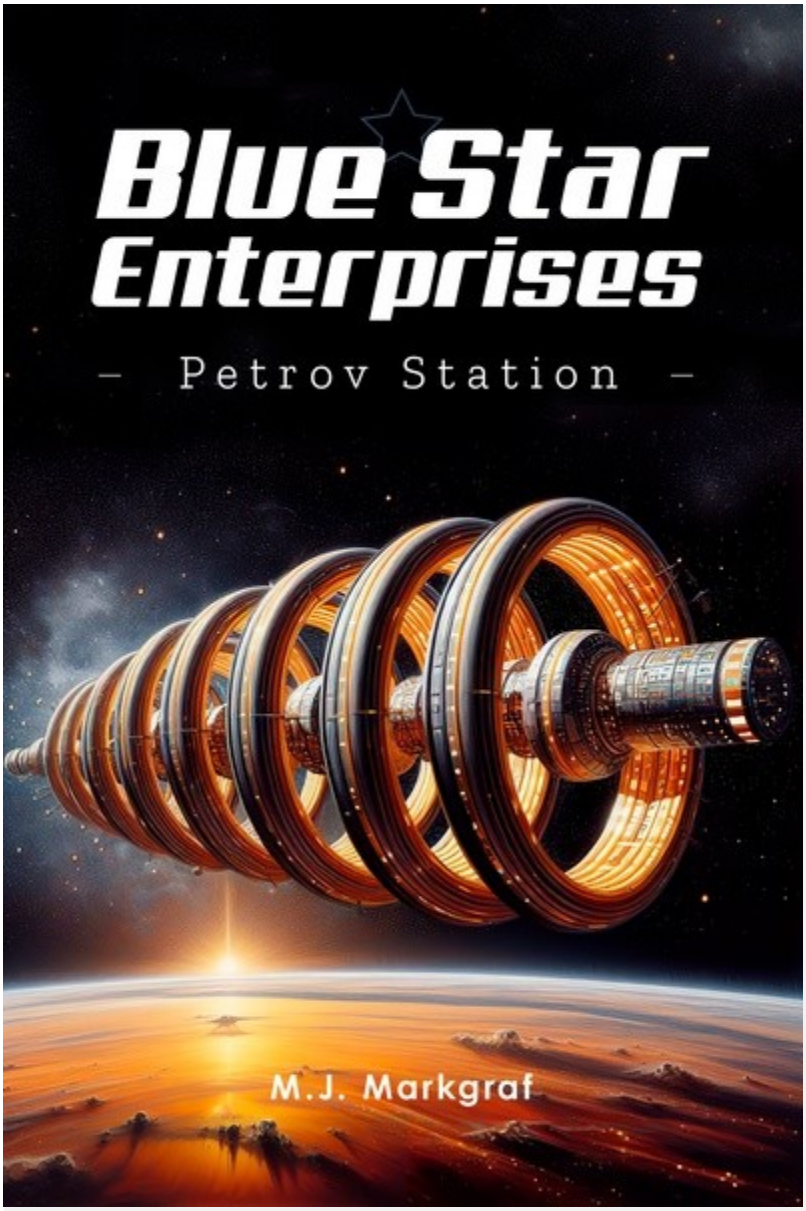
168 - Going All Out168 - Going All Out - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

In a distant future, Alexander wakes to a reality where his past is a fog and his consciousness inhabits a robot body. Faced with a fragmented memory and an uncertain future, he embarks on a quest for answers. Amidst the hum of his repair shop, where he scrapes by, he delves into the mystery of his transformation.

As Alexander forges ahead, stitching together the threads of his identity, unexpected companions join his journey. Among them is a precocious girl whose presence sparks forgotten emotions, offering a glimpse of his lost humanity. Yet, in the shadows, lurk those drawn by his technological prowess, casting ominous shadows over his path.

Caught between the pursuit of understanding and the threat of those who covet his abilities, Alexander confronts a pivotal question: will he succumb to adversity or emerge from the crucible stronger than before?
https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/88287/blue-star-enterprises



Max reached the boss, storing his shield and not caring about the ice that began to assault him.

[Regeneration]

Swinging his weapon with both hands, Max winced at the sound and vibrations that came as his weapon struck the invisible shield.

Over and over, Max swung, and each time, the same thing happened.

Out of the corner of his eye, Max saw Fowl glow for a moment, and his health bar stopped decreasing as fast.

What the hell was that?

With one eye on the his friend’s health bar and the other eye on the spot he was attacking, Max dodged the boss’s attempts to kick him or swat with its weapon.

Every blow that he struck bounced off harmlessly.

Another fireball bloomed over the boss, scorching its hide and drawing its attention.

Max didn't hesitate when the boss started casting again; whatever it was doing was aimed at Tanila and the others.

[Fire Nova]

[Fire Ball]

Two spells went off seconds apart, and Max smiled as the boss’s spell broke down from the impact directly beneath it, centered on its arse.

Max’s mind raced, wondering how he could injure this thing since none of his weapons were able to touch it.

Storing his weapon, Max rammed himself into the boss’s tail, trying to pull it away from his allies. The barrier stopped him for a moment, but then, as he continued to press, he was able to grab around the base of it.

Angry at what was happening to Fowl, Max slid his grip down the tail until he could firmly grip it, struggling as it twitched its tail, attempting to free itself from him.

“I might be a third your size, but I’ll show you size doesn’t matter!”

Max’s shout didn’t bother the boss as much as his yanking on its tail did. It spun, bringing its weapon down on Max, who went for broke.

[Armored Warrior]

The weapon bounced off him, doing nothing, and with his feet firmly planted and no longer able to be moved, Max used his hips and all his strength to twist with all the speed and power he had.

The boss’s feet came off the ground, a shriek of confusion escaping its mouth as Max slammed it into the ground.

Bouncing off the rock a few times, the boss seemed stunned for a moment, and Max took the opportunity to move toward its head.

He ran along its body, the shield that protected it failing to react. When he reached the boss's head Max saw a tiny hole with a small flap of skin over it slightly open that he assumed must be its ear.

The boss started to roll, preparing to get up, and Max didn’t hesitate, slamming his hand wrist deep inside the hole.

It jerked its head back while howling in pain but Max ignored the ear-piercing noise, clinging to the flesh inside with his fingers. The boss shook its head frantically and brought its hand up, slamming it into Max to try to knock him free, but that only drove Max’s hand deeper into the canal.

[Fire Nova]

Max’s spell went off, erupting all around the boss’s face and making it stagger from the pain of the fire inside its ear and the flames that burned across its face.

With only a moment to do what he planned, Max swung his arm in front of the boss’s face, grabbing onto the ridge of its left eye socket. The huge head was huge and long, and the way the skull was shaped left him pressed against the scales as he squeezed.

“Die!” Max shouted as he began to squeeze his hands together, moving his left fist deeper into the eye socket as bones began to break under the stress of the bearhug he was giving its skull.

The boss started shaking its head frantically while still swatting at Max, who ignored its weak attempts to injure him.

Seconds passed as the pressure from Max’s embrace increased. No matter how hard the boss tried, it couldn’t shake or knock Max off. His grip was like a vice.

Bones continued to shatter and crack around the orbital socket as Max squeezed, slowly bringing his hands closer together.

After the last popping noise, Max couldn’t crush the skull anymore. It was too dense, and all of the thinner and weaker sections were now crushed.

Another slap hit Max, but the boss wasn’t designed to overpower with might.

Remembering what the rare spawn could do, Max cast his Frost Nova.

[Frost Nova]

The spell went off, creating a brain-freezing effect that made the boss cry out in pain, throwing its head back as it shrieked.

[Fire Nova]

The second spell washed over the boss's head, igniting the newly exposed flesh and eyes, causing the boss to struggle to keep its balance.

Giving everything he had left, Max activated the last skill he hoped he would need, but he was unsure it would be enough.

[Power Strike]

With his grip still firm inside the lizardman’s ear, Max pulled his left arm back and slammed it into the boss’s skull with everything he had.

Bone broke like twigs, and the skull on the left side of the boss’s head was shattered.

A howl came, high and long, as the boss tripped, unable to handle the pain lancing through its skull.

It fell to the ground, landing on top of Max, pinching him between it and the hard rock below.

No movement came except for the boss breathing slowly, and Max pressed himself up. His sonar told him what he was aiming at. There, just a little bit away, lay the brain, and Max wanted to have a talk with it.

He began punching it, attacking the brain like it owed him money, and he was here to collect, fists smashing it to bits, and it wasn't until the cold shock of power washed over him that Max finally stopped the assault on the dead boss.

[6 Intelligence Consumed]

[6 Wisdom Consumed]

[Consume has Consumed a Higher Rank Skill]

[Ice Magic - Uncommon has been upgraded to Ice Magic - Epic]

[Elemental Mastery - Uncommon has been upgraded to Elemental Mastery - Epic]

Breathing was difficult, wedged in between the skull of the boss, covered in gray matter, and his body and mind struggling with what had just taken place.

Dear gods... I have Tanila's power...

Pressing and twisting, Max cracked more of the skull as he made his way out of the eye socket, covered in blood, brains, and chunks of bone. The smell was awful, but when he got out of the boss, he found the others racing toward him.

Fowl was kneeling on the ground, panting and using his shield to keep him upright, it appeared.

Max raced toward his friend, dropping down next to him and slowly removing his helmet.

"You ok?"

"Gods, you smell like an ogre's arse," Fowl muttered, his tone playful, but his voice was weak.

Bobbing his head, Max chuckled and gave a gentle nudge. "Glad you're no longer a frozen dwarf treat."

Batrire made it a few seconds later and almost barreled Fowl over when she embraced him, tears on her face.

"You did good, my love," Fowl whispered. "Nice job keeping me alive."

She sniffed and ruffled his hair. "Way to use your new skill. I guess you do have half a brain."

"The elemental warrior..." Max muttered. "I wondered what that was... I had forgotten you just picked that up."

"So what did I miss?" Fowl asked as he stood up, letting Batrire help him.

"Something I never imagined was possible," Cordellia replied. "Did you really crush that thing with your bare hands?"

“I had armor on,” Max said. “It had some shield that protected it from all the attacks. Thankfully, once I touched it, those attacks weren’t stopped.”

Shaking her head from side to side, Cordellia stared at the man covered in head to toe except for his bald head and face with gore.

“Why isn’t your head or face like the rest of you?”

Max started to laugh and took off his helmet, revealing the messy helm and still sparkling clean noggin. “Probably the greatest trick in the world,” Max stated before slipping it back on, the helmet disappearing.

“You all done talking?” Tanila asked. “I’m not sure about the rest of you, but that chest looks like we need to go and loot it.”

Wincing, Max realized he hadn’t even tried harvesting the boss’s body, more worried about getting out of it and checking on Fowl. Instead, when he turned around and saw the raid chest waiting on them, his disappointment quickly vanished.

“Fowl, go ahead and open the chest since you didn’t do anything this fight.” Max teased.

Giving Max the middle finger and a wink, Fowl walked to where the massive chest was and pushed it open.

“Sweet Ockrim’s beard,” Fowl exclaimed. “You really need to look in here.”

Max and the others didn’t wait, crowding around the chest and staring inside.

“Everett’s going to flip!” Cordellia gasped. “Four of those gems! Four!”

“Maybe we can just turn one in every few days,” Batrire said as her eyes took in the rest of the loot. “Just to string him along.”

“Before you ask, yes, this happens a lot,” Fowl said, gently poking the tall archer.

“That’s so not fair,” she muttered, her voice still higher than normal. “Five rings… five!”

“I got an idea,” Tanila announced as she grinned. “Everyone takes theirs at the same time. That way, it doesn’t take forever, and we don't have to endure waiting for our turns.”

A round of grunts and nods came quickly, each of them holding their hands over the swirling void.

“On three,” Tanila said, “One, two, three.”

Each of their hands touched the swirling purple void, and a ring materialized in their grip.

Max looked at the ring in the palm of his hand. It was a light blue color that reminded him of a piece of sculptured ice he had seen as a child. The ring seemed to capture the light of the tower floor, illuminating it with a soft blue glow.

“Seth… have you inspected yours yet?”

Max shook his head, glancing up for a moment at Fowl. His friend had displayed a variety of expressions during their adventures together, but Fowl had never been expressionless, his face completely slack.

“Oh my,” Batrire gasped. Her head shook once, and her expression matched Fowl’s.

Unable to wait for them to say something, Max needed to see what was causing the problem.

[Inspect Ring]

*****

Frost Mages Ring of Growth

10% Stat Increase

Bonded

*****

The sound of a ring hitting the hard stone at their feet made the group turn. They saw Cordellia’s hands trembling, her ring spinning for a moment until it came to a stop at her feet.

“How?” She asked the question, looking at the group, her shoulders shaking slightly. Her face was blank like the others, unable to register any emotion.

“We don’t know,” Max replied. “We have ideas, but none of us know.”

Tanila moved next to Cordellia and gave the archer a gentle squeeze on her arm. “Listen, we know what this is like. Trust us, we have gone through it. Even still, the expressions on our faces should tell you that what just happened is far from normal. None of us expect anything like this.”

“But… people would kill… our… your father would–”

“I know,” Tanila said, stopping Cordellia from saying something she shouldn’t. “That is why we don’t want people to know. You have to decide. Will you be faithful to us and to me, or will you choose to betray a path you cannot deny Thuyja has put you on?”

For a moment, their archer stood there, weighing the question posed to her.

“You’re right, princess. I will walk the path Thuyja has put me on.”

She bent down and slid the ring on her finger.

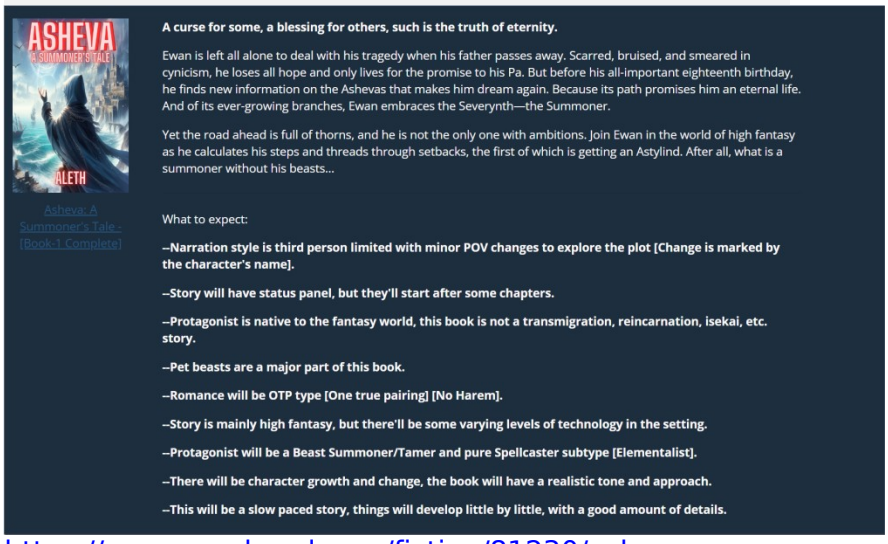
Everyone else smiled, slipping their matching rings on.

“Let’s get those crystals and finish making our way to the exit,” Max said. “I’m ready to take a shower.”

Everyone started to laugh, making faces and backing away from the bald warrior covered in brain matter.

169 - Turning in Trophies[169 - Turning in Trophies - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


ASHEVA
A SUMMONER'S TALE
ALETH
Asheva: A Summoner's Tale - [Book 1 Complete]
A curse for some, a blessing for others, such is the truth of eternity.
Ewan is left all alone to deal with his tragedy when his father passes away. Scarred, bruised, and smeared in cynicism, he loses all hope and only lives for the promise to his Pa. But before his all-important eighteenth birthday, he finds new information on the Ashevas that makes him dream again. Because its path promises him an eternal life. And of its ever-growing branches, Ewan embraces the Severynth—the Summoner.
Yet the road ahead is full of thorns, and he is not the only one with ambitions. Join Ewan in the world of high fantasy as he calculates his steps and threads through setbacks, the first of which is getting an Astylind. After all, what is a summoner without his beasts...
What to expect:
--Narration style is third person limited with minor POV changes to explore the plot [Change is marked by the character's name].
--Story will have status panel, but they'll start after some chapters.
--Protagonist is native to the fantasy world, this book is not a transmigration, reincarnation, isekai, etc. story.
--Pet beasts are a major part of this book.
--Romance will be OTP type [One true pairing] [No Harem].
--Story is mainly high fantasy, but there'll be some varying levels of technology in the setting.
--Protagonist will be a Beast Summoner/Tamer and pure Spellcaster subtype [Elementalist].
--There will be character growth and change, the book will have a realistic tone and approach.
--This will be a slow paced story, things will develop little by little, with a good amount of details.
https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/81230/asheva-a-summoners-tale-book-1-complete

Everett sat on the chair he had pulled up, still unable to form words. His eyes drifted between the five massive yellow crystals on the table and the group of five sitting on the two couches in his office.

Tom coughed to break the awkward silence and squeezed the Faction leader’s shoulder. “So, two rare spawns, one we have never faced before or have a record of in over a hundred years…” Tom’s voice trailed off as he struggled with the knowledge of what Max and the others had done in just two days.

“I wrote a report on the new rare spawn. Honestly, we almost lost to it but were able to pull out a win. I’m not sure a standard team at our level could take it out.”

Laughter came from Everett as he shook his head and finally grinned. “Why is it I don’t feel you’re bragging but simply telling the truth?” he asked, turning his attention to Cordellia. “Tell me, are you satisfied now with getting to join this group?”

Their archer nodded and grinned. “Part of me feels like I should not accept the reduced dues for joining the team, but I won't,” she replied. “All I can say is I doubt there is a party like this below the one hundred and twentieth floor.”

Tom’s eyebrows rose at that statement, and Max saw the man frown.

“The drop rate on the gems?”

“Eight or nine out of ten,” Tanila informed Tom. “I guess we should mention that each of us hit the first level for the tower already.”

“Of course you did,” Tom said, sighing afterward. “You really can’t share that information. Doing so would cause many problems not only in our Faction but in the others.”

Each of the team nodded, all knowing that wouldn’t happen.

“So let me ask a question,” Max said as he moved closer to the edge of the couch. “Are you okay with us going as fast as possible through the tower to the ninth floor? We want to maximize time and effort, and based on what I think I know of the creatures' strength and stats, we want to see what the bosses on the fifth and ninth floors are like.”

“Gods, you all are crazy,” Tom declared, throwing his hands up into the air. “Everett, they have no idea what they are–”

Their Faction leader held up his hand, and a wry grin appeared as he cut off Tom. “Actually, I think they have more of an idea than we imagine. Two days Tom… they cleared the first floor in two days, reached level one for tower experience and,” Everett turned his gaze to Max, Tanila, and Cordellia all sitting next to each other on the couch, “are how far along in the next level?”

“A little over halfway to level fifty-one,” Tanila replied.

“Holy mother of ogre tits,” Tom cursed.

“And halfway through their first level,” Everett continued. “Let’s trust their judgment and knowledge of their own skills. Cordellia is experienced and will give them the advice they need when moving through the tower. All we can do is support and encourage them.”

“Just don’t be stupid,” Tom added. “Seriously, the tower isn’t kind. One mistake can cost someone their life.”

Max and the others nodded, each well aware of how Fowl was almost killed by their lack of preparation and knowledge of the rare spawns.

“Anything else?” Everett asked, sensing how everyone appeared to be ready to go.

“We’ll be moving into the Faction house if that is okay. As much as we enjoy our room at our inn, the time has come to be close and take advantage of the amenities offered by being a member,” Batrire said. “Is there a date that we could move in?”

“Already taken care of,” Tom replied, pulling a key ring from his storage and starting to slide keys around. After a few seconds, he pulled two keys off and handed one to Max and the other to Fowl. “Those are for your rooms. You’ll find them on the third floor and across the hall from each other. The walls are enchanted to prevent noise from escaping or coming in, except for an alarm that hopefully won’t be heard for a long time to come.”

Everyone saw Tom and Everett’s posture shift and tensing of their bodies when he mentioned the explosion from a few days ago.

“Very well, if you don’t mind, we’ll leave and collect our things from the inn, moving in here.”

Tom nodded at Batrire.

Everyone stood and began walking toward the door except Max, who hung back as the others went ahead.

“Another one of those talks?” Everett joked as Max’s group didn’t even look back, already knowing he was going to stay behind for a moment.

“Yup, but I promise this one isn’t as bad as the rest,” Max replied. “What I really need to talk about is money, some new dimensional storage items, and a really weird question after the first two are dealt with.”

Everett’s eyebrow raised at Max’s last words, but the man moved to his desk and motioned to the two chairs that were facing it. “Let’s sit and discuss things there.”

As the three of them got settled in their seats, Max could see Tom still struggling with the memory of the passing of Baldin.

Leaning over slightly, he put his hand on Tom’s forearm, which was resting on the chair arm, and squeezed. “I offered a prayer for you and Baldin. I’m always here if you ever need me.”

The older man’s lips pulled into his mouth for a moment, and he nodded once. “I appreciate that, Seth. I really do, but… it’s going to take some time. That dwarf was like a brother and…” Tom glanced across the desk at Everett, whose expression was like unmoving a rock. “He was special to my friend. I’ll manage, but it will take time. Thank you again… for what you did.”

Squeezing Tom’s arm once more, Max nodded and sat back, looking at Everett, who had cleared his throat and had a book open on his desk.

“How much gold do you need?”

Max chuckled and smiled. “Like how much can I have or how much do I have access to?”

Sighing, Everett rubbed his eyes for a moment before studying Max. “Do you really need money, or are you just asking?”

“The answer is yes to both. There are some things I want to buy, and it shouldn’t be too bad, but part of that also requires us to get the dimensional storage items that have a greater capacity and allow for instant changing of gear.”

Tom grunted and waited till Everett was looking at him. “We have two that are technically available for loaning.”

Everett’s head moved side to side for a moment as he studied Tom’s face.

“You’re ok with that?” he finally asked.

Nodding, Tom shifted a little in his chair. “He would want it that way.”

Smacking his lips, Everett sniffed and then grabbed a piece of paper and wrote a quick note on it. “Come by tomorrow, I’ll have two for you that you can use. They won’t technically be yours, but Tom’s right. They would best be used right now by your group. I’m assuming they’re for you and Fowl?”

“Yeah… one doesn’t realize how uncomfortable it is trying to change out of gear covered in brains.”

Both Tom and Everett chuckled, each smirking at knowing how dirty tower climbing could get.

“Back to the gold, though, I need maybe fifty gold.”

Without hesitating, Everett opened his desk drawer and reached inside. In a moment, a coin pouch appeared. He tossed it to Max, who caught it easily.

“Fifty gold,” Everett stated. “Try not to spend it all in one place.”

Snorting, Max bobbed his head and put it in his storage. “I should have asked for more.”

“You could have, but it also speaks highly that you’re not asking for some crazy number. What’s the third point you felt needed to be discussed last.”

Running his hand across his bald head, Max frowned for a moment.

“Baldin was a crafter, wasn’t he?”

Everett’s eyes gazed down at the desk and nodded slowly. “He was… one of the best. Losing him… it hurt our Faction in more ways than you can imagine.”

Taking a deep breath, Max let it out slowly. He and Tanila had discussed this next part multiple times. There was no way to share the truth of what he could do or had with either of these men. Maybe when they were past the halfway point in the tower, but it was still too dangerous right now.

“How stupid would it be for an adventurer to learn a crafting skill?”

Tom coughed twice, pounding his chest, and looked at Max like he was a fool.

“You want to waste a skill slot and the skill ups on a crafting skill? What kind of idiot are you?”

“Tom, wait–”

“No, Everett, don’t,” Tom said, ignoring his friend and leader. “It’s the most idiotic thing I have ever heard in my entire career as an adventurer. To waste those precious skill upgrades is beyond stupid. Even if you managed to reach level one hundred as an adventurer, taking it even then would be worthless because you wouldn’t have any extra skill points by then to advance its rank.”

“I hear you. I was just trying to find a way to help the Faction if that was an option down the road.”

Max’s statement caught both men off guard. Each of them sat back in their chairs a little more and stared at the warrior before them.

“Seth… that’s… probably the most selfless thing I have heard in a long time, especially when we know how much potential you have as a tower climber. Still, we wouldn’t ask that or want that from you, knowing how it will hinder your potential growth. Even worse,” Everett continued as he leaned against the desk, “you could do far more by focusing on the tower and providing resources that will allow us to grow in different ways. Does that make sense?”

Max nodded and smiled. “Just wanted to ask.”

“We appreciate that, we really do. Any other questions you want to ask that will surprise Tom and me?”

Max laughed as he stood up and held out his hand toward Everett. “I’m good. It's time to catch up with the group and get ready to move in. Thanks again.”

Everett shook his head and pointed at the five yellow still sitting on the table. “No, son, we owe you all more than you know for those. At that rate, another one of your team could easily acquire an Epic skill.”

Max gave Tom a gentle pat on his shoulder, the older man still sitting in his chair. “You two behave then, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Give me your thoughts,” Everett said as he moved to the table and began storing the crystals in his storage. “Tell me I’m not dreaming.”

Tom had only turned his chair around, choosing to stay seated as Max left. His hands were clasped together, and he was playing with his chin with both pointer fingers.

“It’s not a dream but, in some ways, a possible nightmare,” Tom finally replied. “If their team can actually make it past the fiftieth floor… it’s going to draw a lot of attention. Attention, I’m not certain we are ready for.”

Everett grunted as he put the last crystal away and moved to the chair beside Tom.

“We have time, though. Perhaps enough, even at the rate they seem to be progressing. Did Cordellia tell you anything?”

Tom closed his eyes, raised his head, and started to laugh. His whole body shook for a few moments as he laughed, eventually stopping with a massive sigh.

“Honestly? We’re screwed. Ogre size screwed,” Tom replied. “That girl won’t tell me anything worth knowing. She is completely different than before. Whatever happened on the floor and that goblin shite story they told us, Cordellia isn’t going to betray them.”

“We didn’t expect her to betray them,” Everett said, his eyebrows coming together. “We just wanted information about their true abilities.”

“That’s betrayal,” Tom replied, clearing his throat. “Just as I won’t share your true ability with anyone else, I doubt Cordellia will ever do the same about them. Something about that group feels like… a whirlpool.”

“A what?” Everett asked, blinking a few times in confusion.

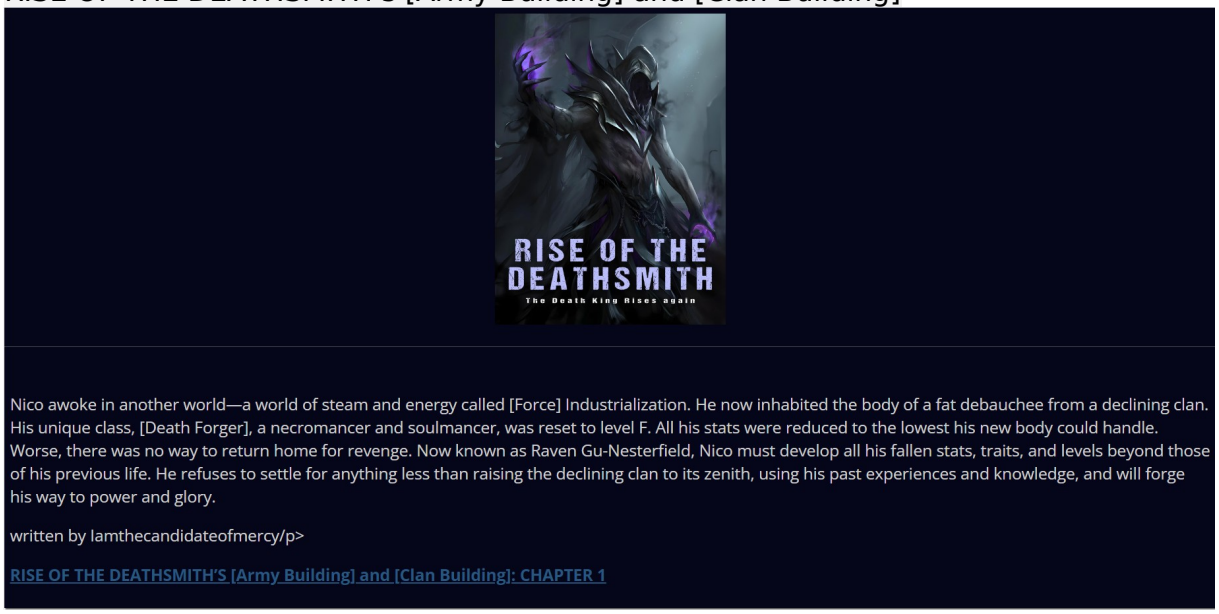
“Boats on the sea have mentioned that occasionally, one shows up in certain areas. When they appear, everything gets drawn in by the power of it. Ships that have weathered giant storms are weak against its power, and some of the greatest have been pulled under by it. Those four…” Tom shifted in his chair, turning so he could stare into Everett’s eyes. “Those four are somehow touched by the gods, pulling everything to them. Soon enough, I doubt I could defeat Seth in a duel, and a part of me wonders if I would lose even now. Call it a predator’s feeling. Like a big cat stalking in the forest and sneaking up on another animal that looks like prey, it knows somehow that no matter how calm and docile the creature before it looks, attacking it might just end their life.”

Everett nodded, knowing Tom was right. The truth was that Tanila gave off the same vibe, and that made him even more nervous. Two in one group was a very scary thing.

170 - Old Tricks[170 - Old Tricks - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

RISE OF THE DEATHSMITH's [Army Building] and [Clan Building]


RISE OF THE DEATHSMITH
The Death King Rises again
Nico awoke in another world—a world of steam and energy called [Force] Industrialization. He now inhabited the body of a fat debauchee from a declining clan. His unique class, [Death Forger], a necromancer and soulmancer, was reset to level F. All his stats were reduced to the lowest his new body could handle. Worse, there was no way to return home for revenge. Now known as Raven Gu-Nesterfield, Nico must develop all his fallen stats, traits, and levels beyond those of his previous life. He refuses to settle for anything less than raising the declining clan to its zenith, using his past experiences and knowledge, and will forge his way to power and glory.
written by Iamthecandidateofmercy/p>
RISE OF THE DEATHSMITH'S [Army Building] and [Clan Building]: CHAPTER 1

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/87564/rise-of-the-deathsmith-army-building-and-clan/chapter/1658899/1-system-reset

Alexander had been saddened at the news of their departure but knew it was coming. After the birthday party and the announcement that they had reached level fifty, he had prepared one last treat for them.

"This is amazing!" Batrire exclaimed as she drank the drink through the straw.

Laughing, Alexander smiled as the other three nodded and grunted, each amazed at the flavor and texture.

"I don't make that often, so I want you four to know I have enjoyed the time you spent here. Anytime you need a room or just a meal, I'm always here."

"We appreciate that," Max said as he set the frozen pineapple drink on the table. He then pulled a bag from his storage, handed it to Alexander, and grinned. "A few last items for any possible adventurers. Know that they should serve whoever gets them for a long time."

"You're a rare person, Seth Pendal, but I guess with a name like that I shouldn't expect anything less," the Innkeeper said as he took the backpack and added it to his

storage. “Anything else you four need? I need to get back and ensure dinner is on track.”

They shook their heads and after another round of handshakes and goodbyes, watched Alexander disappear into the kitchen.

“I’m going to miss his ale,” Fowl said with a sigh, having already emptied his glass.

“But your waistline won’t,” Batrire teased.

“We ready?” Tanila asked as she set her almost empty glass down.

Max nodded and winked at her. “I for one am ready for a bath and a good night's sleep. Tower camping isn’t as fun as I thought it would be.”

Everyone laughed and agreed as they moved toward the inn's door.

“That’s new,” Fowl pointed out as he reached the tower portal first. “We can choose the floor we want to start on?”

Cordellia nodded and grinned. “I told you, but apparently you weren’t listening.”

“He never does,” Batrire said, shaking her head and frowning. “If it’s not about beer or beards, getting him to pay attention is hard.”

“Forgive me for being a little foggy after getting turned into a frozen dwarfcicle. Next time, I’ll make sure to thaw out faster.”

Each of them selected the second floor and walked through, finding themselves standing outside what looked like a large flower garden.

“Dwarf balls, this is going to suck,” Cordellia cursed as she glanced around at the area.

Huge stone walls ran behind them and then were covered up with vines and other large flowers, trees, and plants. A small clearing of about fifty yards was before them, and then stone walkways led through a fifteen-foot-tall stone arch into the collection of vegetation.

“What tower floor is this?”

“It's a bad one,” Cordellia answered Fowl. “I’ve never been in one, but I’ve heard about them from the reports, which, by the way, I think we need to get you all a copy of sooner rather than later. The experience is even better than the last one, but you won’t know what’s a threat until it actually attacks.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Max asked. “How is that possible?”

“See those large flowers on the left past the arch? Those can all be flowers or monsters,” she replied.” And before you ask, no, you don’t want to destroy everything along the path. Doing so will make the creatures stronger.”

“I'm Glad she’s with us; otherwise, someone might have tried burning down the floor,” Fowl said, elbowing Max.

“I’ll take point then,” Max said. “Fowl, you stay near the others. I’m our best bet at finding what's real and what isn’t.”

“Um… I’m sorry. Can you run that by me?” Cordellia asked. You’re strong, and I know you can use magic, but how can you think for a moment that you’re the one who should be at the front of the party?”

Max smiled, seeing how Cordellia was standing, hips cocked to one side.

“You’ll see. Now, let’s get ready. I want to see what we’re up against.”

Max and Fowl both turned at the same time to look at each other and smiled.

Less than a second later, they were no longer in normal clothes, instead, their armor and weapons were in place.

“This is so going to make taking a wizz a thousand times easier,” Fowl stated, grinning from ear to ear.

“It’s sad that was my first thought too,” Max replied.

After everyone was ready and Tanila had her fire familiar summoned, they began moving slowly toward the arch.

Max tried to ignore a lot of the weird sounds that seemed to come from everywhere, instead focusing on trying to find movement or something that hinted at a monster waiting to leap out from somewhere.

The stone path they were on was only ten feet wide, and the patches of flowers and trees that ran along both sides for as far as he could see until it turned and disappeared left a weird sensation in his mind.

“Batrire, be ready with those heals.”

Their dwarf grunted loudly, aware of what Max was implying.

He was ten yards ahead of the group, sticking to the middle of the path and already fifty yards in, wondering how soon the tower floor would reveal its true nature.

Flowers a little less than twice his height, with huge petals and thick stems, hung over the walkway, looking ready to pounce on whoever walked under them. Trees with massive branches, moss, and vines seemed ready to suddenly come to life and devour anyone foolish enough to get close.

Up ahead, Max could see what looked like giant vegetables growing in the ground.

“Cordellia, are those things edible? Should we bring some back to the faction?”

“I believe so, but again, it is the first time for me in a floor like this.”

Max nodded and held his shield and halberd ready.

As he approached a section of the path with multicolored flowers on both sides, a wind began to blow, and everything around him started to move.

His sonar was picking up everything, but nothing felt like an attack.

A thought ran through Max’s brain, and he stopped moving. He turned to look at the four behind him, each wondering what he was doing.

“How strong are these creatures, Cordellia? I mean like super strong, or is it the threat of them suddenly attacking that causes problems?”

Their archer massaged her neck for a moment and appeared to be trying to remember what she had read.

“It’s not that they are strong. It's the numbers and the sudden attack,” she answered. “If they surround the group and get to the casters or healers, then you can imagine what happens next.”

A devilish grin appeared on Max’s face, and Fowl immediately started to groan.

“Stop looking at me like that,” Fowl said. “I don’t like that look.”

“Get up here and stop complaining; be the warrior your woman thinks you are. Besides, if Cordellia is right, I think I know what we’re going to do.”

Tanila started to chuckle, and then Batrire joined her, each of them having an idea of what Max was thinking.

“I’m sorry. Obviously, I’m new, but what the heck is so funny?”

“We’re going to do something we did in a dungeon, and if it doesn’t work, we’ll all escape while Fowl dies, but if it does, this zone may be the easiest one we face.”

Cursing under his breath, Fowl began rotating his shoulders and pulled out a second shield to replace his new hammer.

“Goatmen?” Fowl asked, his voice not hiding the displeasure he felt.

“Goatmen!” Max exclaimed. “Tanila, you fill in, Cordellia. I’m going to get us a few groups to try.”

“INCOMING!”

Cordellia had already come to realize Max and the others were insane, but when Max had taken off running, a pack of wildflowers with tentacles and giant mouths jumped out of their area and chased after him. Max continued sprinting down the path. She knew things were going to get even wilder after that moment when Tanila started bouncing up and down excitedly.

About four packs of monsters, all moving mostly together, were coming down the path. A few large trees with gaping maws, moving branches with hands, and vines whipping around, moved with dragon flowers snapping as they moved, giant teeth longer than her arm, all around their petals.

“Be ready, Fowl!” Batrire called out.

“Remember, use your area of affect attack when I tell you,” Tanila told Cordellia. “Let Fowl do his job, and we’ll do ours.”

“This is insane!” Cordellia argued. “There are at least fifteen monsters there!”

“Trust us!” Tanila snapped as she focused on the group coming and the speed at which Max was moving.

“He’s gotten better at that,” Batrire said casually. “Their clumped up way better this time.”

Tanila saw a Fire Nova go off from Max as he approached them and realized that something was different. It was wider, and more flames erupted than before.

“Ogre shite,” she cursed silently, noticing that Batrire looked at her with a raised eyebrow but shook her head. “Just remind me to talk with Seth later about something.”

Batrire grunted, seeing that Max was about ten seconds from them.

“Preparing to cast!” Tanila shouted.

Max came to a stop behind Fowl, grinning like a fool, his bald head shining in the soft glow of the tower floor's light. A mid-day sun hung overhead, bathing everything in warm light, including the horde of pissed-off and burning plants fighting for space on the narrow pathway.

“Gods, this is going to suck!” Fowl exclaimed as he moved a few paces ahead.

Max said nothing, starting to summon a fireball not near the size of Tanila’s but still much larger than the one he had on the first floor.

He had considered telling Tanila about his new skill but wanted to wait and show it off, knowing how much she would enjoy it.

The fireball descended on the pack just as Tanila’s did, and he immediately began casting fire nova, grinning as their mage came up next to him.

Fowl raced ahead, moving through the horde of monsters, burnt and wilted leaves, missing pieces of bark and stems, and more.

“Taunting!”

Fowl’s taunt went off, and as it had with the goatmen, every creature turned immediately, their focus on Fowl, and began pounding against the shields he used to hide between. Vines encircled him all around as others tried to bite or strike him. The dense pack of monsters prevented any from getting a good attack on him.

Both Fire Novas went off at the same time, and as the fire spread out from them, scorching regular plants and monsters alike, the pack made shrieks and weird noises.

Everything but the three trees fell over dead or were burnt to ash.

Max raced in, using his axe, and lived the life of a lumberjack for a moment, felling trees with a few strikes.

Cold power came over him as he sapped the life from the trees.

[6 Constitution Consumed]

[3 Constitution Consumed]

Max frowned slightly as the third tree died to his blade, wondering why no more stats had come.

“Gods, I hate being that guy,” Fowl muttered, turning around with a grin covering his face. “Still, that experience was amazing!”

Max felt a hand on his shoulder, and Tanila spun him around, leaning forward and putting her ear near his. “Care to tell me what rank your elemental mastery is?” she whispered before standing up straight.

Winking, he motioned at Cordellia with his head and beckoned her to come close with a finger. When his lips were next to Tanila’s ears, he blew gently against it for a second before saying, “Epic.”

Shuddering, the mage stood upright and tried to glare but couldn’t keep it before smiling. She shook her head. “You’re a bastard… no other way to say that. I'd say something worse if I didn’t like you.”

“Thankfully, you do,” Max replied.

“Guys, I think we broke her.”

Batrire’s voice made Max and Tanila turn to see Cordellia standing there like a statue. Her bow was out with an arrow ready, but her mouth hung open as their archer stared past Max and Tanila.

“Don’t ask!” Fowl shouted. “It won’t make it better.”

The dwarf turned and saw what Cordellia was actually looking at.

“Holy goblin shite! Look at this loot!”

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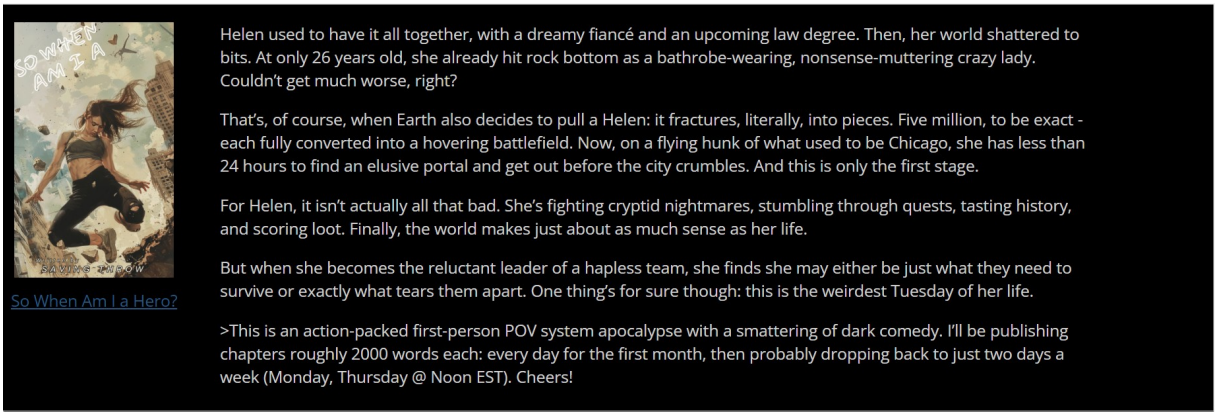
A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

RISE OF THE DEATHSMITH’s [Army Building] and [Clan Building]


SO WHEN AM I A
SAMUEL SHADOW
So When Am I a Hero?
Helen used to have it all together, with a dreamy fiancé and an upcoming law degree. Then, her world shattered to bits. At only 26 years old, she already hit rock bottom as a bathrobe-wearing, nonsense-muttering crazy lady. Couldn't get much worse, right?
That's, of course, when Earth also decides to pull a Helen: it fractures, literally, into pieces. Five million, to be exact - each fully converted into a hovering battlefield. Now, on a flying hunk of what used to be Chicago, she has less than 24 hours to find an elusive portal and get out before the city crumbles. And this is only the first stage.
For Helen, it isn't actually all that bad. She's fighting cryptid nightmares, stumbling through quests, tasting history, and scoring loot. Finally, the world makes just about as much sense as her life.
But when she becomes the reluctant leader of a hapless team, she finds she may either be just what they need to survive or exactly what tears them apart. One thing's for sure though: this is the weirdest Tuesday of her life.
>This is an action-packed first-person POV system apocalypse with a smattering of dark comedy. I'll be publishing chapters roughly 2000 words each: every day for the first month, then probably dropping back to just two days a week (Monday, Thursday @ Noon EST). Cheers!

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/87753/so-when-am-i-a-hero

The ground was covered in yellow gems, and even a branch lay on the stone path.

“It’s a crafting ingredient,” Fowl informed everyone after he picked it up. “For a moment, I wasn’t sure if it was misbehaving healers.”

“Tanila… you both killed all of them without really a scratch,” Cordellia finally got out after her initial shock. “I forgot to attack. Does… how… this is impossible. Killing that many at once! I’ve never heard of someone doing it that way before.”

“Neither had we,” Max replied, turning to see that Fowl had already collected most of the gems. “We don’t want to fight like others. We want to use our brains. Tell us if you think of something outside the box that might work. Why let the tower tell you how to fight if you can do it your way?”

The archer stood there for a moment and began to nod slowly. “You’re right. There were a few times I thought perhaps the group I was with could do something different, but they never thought it was a good idea. Are you saying it's okay to try something new?”

“None of us will say no immediately. Tell us what you think and why, and if we can, we’ll try it. Trust me, the first time we did this, Fowl thought we were crazy.”

“They are crazy!” Fowl shouted, still picking up the last few gems.

“Now what?” Cordellia asked, motioning to the path Max had pulled the creatures along.

“We wait for his taunt cooldown to reset, and I’ll go pull more. I’ll bring as many as I can this time, so make sure to attack.”

Cordellia nodded and glanced at Batrire, who was reading a book.

“Ignore me, dear,” Batrire said, not looking up from the page she was reading. “I’ve got nothing to do. I picked this up after the goatmen dungeon, and I’m glad I did.”

Max laughed and pulled out a large backpack. From it, he pulled out two small chairs.

“Not much, but take a seat.”

Cordellia groaned yet still smiled, moving to where Max had pointed.

This group was nothing like she could ever have imagined.

“Holy elf tits!” Fowl cursed as he jumped up and down, trying to get a better view of the horde approaching them. Max was running out in front of more monsters than he could count or imagine, keeping ahead of them and occasionally sending a fireball at the group.

“He’s going to kill them all,” Tanila muttered.

“What?” Batrire asked. “You’re certain?”

“Look at your experience bar. It’s been going up. I’m guessing he’s killed at least ten just getting that many here.”

Moving into position, Tanila got ready, waiting to see the actual number Max had brought back.

Her fireball, combined with Max’s once he was behind Fowl, killed all but two trees, allowing Max to jog back out and hack them to pieces.

“Come on, man,” Fowl groaned. “Did you seriously do that?”

Max shrugged and motioned to the massive amount of yellow gems littering the stone path. “I found a clearing and killed a few there, gathering more. After we collect all these items and those on the path, we can move up to the clearing. There are a few more paths to try off of it.”

“You say that like you didn’t just almost solo the whole pack,” Tanila said as she joined Max and Fowl in collecting the drops. A petal, another crafting item, was on the ground and was stored.

“Can I ask a question?” Cordellia whispered, having jogged up next to Tanila.

“Sure, but you don’t have to whisper. We’re family.”

Everyone chuckled at Tanila’s statement, but no one paid any attention to the two women conversing.

She nodded slowly in response to Tanila’s reply and bit her lip for a moment. Finally, pointing a finger at Max, she spoke. “Just how strong is he?”

Tanila couldn’t help herself, bursting out in laughter, catching Cordellia off guard and making the woman’s cheeks and ears turn red. Fowl and Batrire also chuckled, doing their best to be a little more courteous and not be as loud.

After catching her breath and sighing, Tanila bent down and picked up a gem, holding it in her finger for a moment. She held it out to Cordellia and offered it to her. “Crush it. Tell me what you feel.”

With a raised eyebrow, the archer took it and broke it between her fingers, feeling the power entering her. It was like a trickle now. The higher she climbed, the slower and less it felt. She would soon hit level fifty-five at the speed at which they were clearing this tower floor. With the gems from yesterday, she was now on her fourth level in the tower. Even with a tiny drop like this, she felt stronger. Like the gods themselves were bending down and putting a finger on her.

“He’s touched by the gods?” Cordellia half asked, half stated in shock.

“Am I also touched?” Tanila asked, her eyes now locked on the brown eyes of their archer.

Bobbing her head, Cordellia acknowledged that all elves believed royalty was.

“Then there shouldn’t be any more questions about how or why. Just know he is stronger than me, and I’m ok with that.”

Cordellia stared at Max for a moment and then moved quickly, picking up the tiny gems without being asked.

“This is a pretty decent size clearing,” Fowl stated as they stood in a giant square stone-covered area of the tower. “At least sixty yards on each side from the center.”
“And three other paths,” Batrire pointed out, motioning to the arches embedded in the stone walls. “Which one do we want to try first?”

After following the stone path, they entered through a stone arch and were surrounded by twenty-foot stone walls, but behind them, they knew there were more of the same plants and other things out there.

Max shrugged and motioned to Cordellia. “Why don’t you pick? We’ll see what I find down that one first.”

“Why me?”

“Because when Tanila picks, we end up taking the long way,” Fowl answered.

Tanila scowled for a moment before nodding that Fowl was right.

“How about the right one then?” Cordellia asked. “Never hurts to be right.”

Fowl chuckled and motioned to everyone to move back a little closer to where they had come.

“We’re ready when you are,” Fowl announced as his clothes shifted back to his plate armor and two shields.

Max nodded and began to move toward the arch on the right, only to realize Tanila was coming up behind him. “Do you Need something?” he asked with a wink.

“Not that,” she replied, rolling her eyes but smiling. “Walk with me for a moment. I have a question.”

When they were out of hearing range, Tanila finally said what was on her mind.

“You’re able to do what you are because you get mana back from killing all those monsters.”

“Are you asking or telling me?” Max asked.

“We both know I’m right,” she replied before motioning to the group back at the arch they had come through. “Do you really need us at all?”

Wincing, Max frowned as he stared at the group waiting on them. “In here? No. I’ve figured out how to keep them bunched together, using the new Frost Nova to slow down the faster ones. They’re all melee, which is weird, and I don’t get any stats anymore. I got nine points of constitution at the beginning, so I’m guessing one hundred and thirty is the max stat in here so far. Honestly, I’m a bit blown away by how things work and unsure of what to do. I didn’t want to reveal my whole skill set, but that mage lizard almost made me go all out.

Tanila nodded. Smiling, she grabbed his hand and squeezed it. “Well, go have fun soloing the tower… I’ll sit here getting stronger by doing nothing but looking pretty.”

Max laughed and rose slightly on his toes, kissing her on the lips before darting off toward the arch.

“Be ready! I’ll be back soon!”

Touching her lips, Tanila smiled and made her way back to the others.

Thuyja, I owe you a few extra tithes…

Max had over sixty monsters following him when he returned.

Tanila had monitored his mana bar, which would decrease and then shoot back up, gaining a trickle of experience as he killed and gained mana back.

“Look alive!” Fowl shouted as the horde of plants, trees, and mushrooms with massive teeth and stretchy arms pushed past each other into the clearing.

“Most appear almost dead!” Tanila announced. She turned toward Cordellia and smiled.

“Why don’t you take a crack at them?”

The archer nodded and unleashed a volley on the creatures as they came through the stone archway, three waves of arrows pounding tight space and killing a few in the process.

“Two fireballs!” Max declared as he spun around near Fowl.

After both of their fireballs exploded upon the masses, a cloud of green gas appeared where the dead plants were.

“Stay back! That’s the mushrooms!”

It took a minute, and eventually, the cloud of gas that had appeared vanished, leaving only a collection of yellow gems and a few materials on the ground.

“What are those?” Fowl asked.

“Something new and not what I had expected. Their poison isn’t something you want to experience. You four give me a minute. I’m going to go back and collect the gems that are waiting back there, and then I’ll check out the next path. That way led to a clearing, but no exit that I could find.”

“So, just sit and wait on you?” Fowl said as he started walking toward the loot.

“About what you’re used to,” Max replied, smiling as he took off.

Fowl glanced at Batrire, who had gone back to reading her book. “You’re not going to help?”

Batrire shook her head and waved him away with a hand. “No… for once, I’m going to do nothing and enjoy it. Now, back to work.”

Their warrior groaned momentarily before collecting the loot he had done nothing to earn.

A brief moment passed where Tanila had held her breath, Max’s health going below half and then quickly rose along with his mana. A bigger chunk than usual of experience came during that moment.

“Is he ok?” Cordellia asked.

Biting her lip, Tanila nodded, trying to be brave, but she wasn’t sure.

More experience poured in and about ten minutes later, Max came jogging toward them, covered in a purple goo.

“I need a cure!” Max shouted. “Poisoned!”

Batrire moved quickly, casting her spell, and the purple goo faded from Max’s armor and body.

“Ok, that one was fun, and we need to head that way anyway.”

“You almost died,” Fowl stated, “and yet you’re telling us it was fun?”

“Exactly!” Max replied, excited about something. “I’m assuming this is the right path as the clearing at the end of the path I took has an exit, but there is a creature inside the clearing. It will be fun trying to defeat it. I got clumped up among the plants trying to get back to you all and had to run through the area off the path. Just as a heads up, some of the fruit explodes if you get close and poisons you.”

“He’s still smiling about all this,” Cordellia pointed out. “Like… it’s a game.”

“To him, I guess it is,” Tanila replied with a shrug. “Besides, if Seth’s this excited about something, I can’t wait to see what it is.

Having collected all the drops on the way Max was leading, he was practically giddy when they made the last turn and headed toward the stone arch leading to another clearing.

Ignoring the trees, different fruits, plants, and flowers on the side, an even larger stone wall appeared, this one over forty feet high, blocking out any view inside except through the ten-foot wide arch.

“Is that a tree?” Fowl asked as he moved near the arch, only to stop when he saw what it was.

“A giant sunflower?” Cordellia asked, standing next to the dwarf who had yet to enter the clearing.

“The teeth on that thing and those spikes,” Batrire said, motioning at the thirty-foot-tall plant. “Something tells me this might be a bad idea.”

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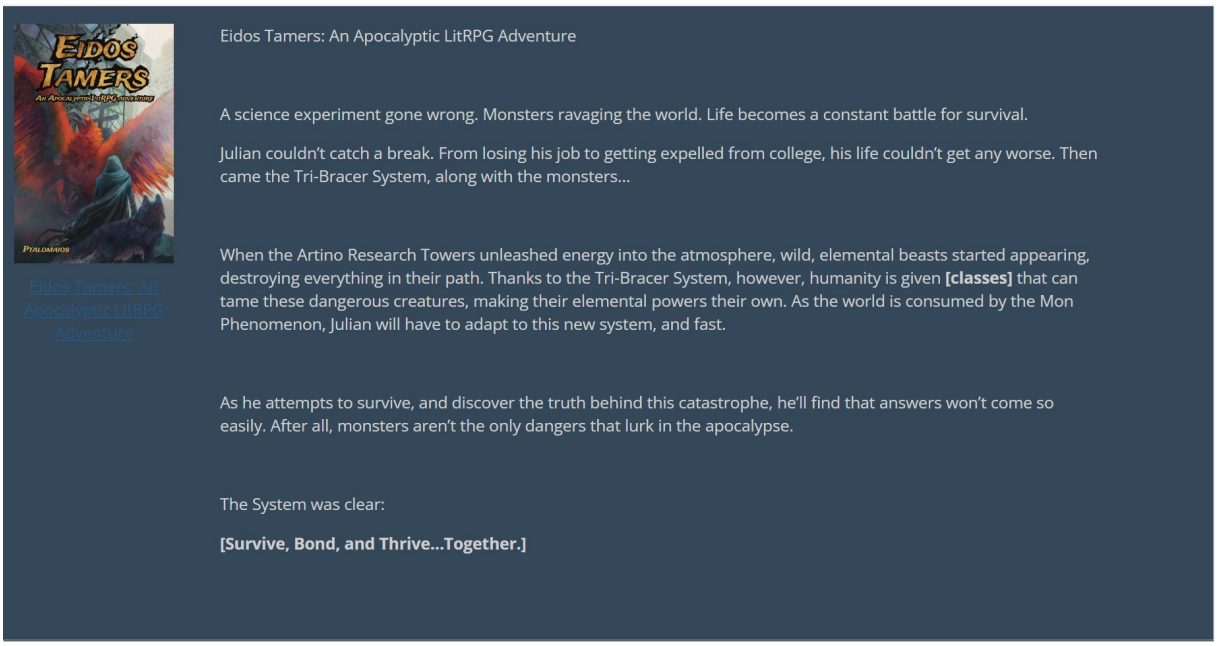
A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

RISE OF THE DEATHSMITH’s [Army Building] and [Clan Building]


Eidos Tamers
An Apocalyptic LitRPG Adventure
Ptalomaios
Eidos Tamers: An Apocalyptic LitRPG Adventure
Eidos Tamers: An Apocalyptic LitRPG Adventure
A science experiment gone wrong. Monsters ravaging the world. Life becomes a constant battle for survival.
Julian couldn’t catch a break. From losing his job to getting expelled from college, his life couldn’t get any worse. Then came the Tri-Bracer System, along with the monsters...
When the Artino Research Towers unleashed energy into the atmosphere, wild, elemental beasts started appearing, destroying everything in their path. Thanks to the Tri-Bracer System, however, humanity is given [classes] that can tame these dangerous creatures, making their elemental powers their own. As the world is consumed by the Mon Phenomenon, Julian will have to adapt to this new system, and fast.
As he attempts to survive, and discover the truth behind this catastrophe, he’ll find that answers won’t come so easily. After all, monsters aren’t the only dangers that lurk in the apocalypse.
The System was clear:
[Survive, Bond, and Thrive...Together.]

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/87637/eidos-tamers-an-apocalyptic-litrpg-adventure

“So we’re not going to fight this then?” Cordellia asked a slight hint of relief in her voice.

“Of course, we’re going to fight it,” Fowl replied with a chuckle. “Why would we pass up on a rare spawn?”

Max and Tanila ignored Batrire’s groan, taking in the sight before them.

“You sure this is a good idea?” Tanila asked quietly.

Max shrugged and pointed around the clearing. “It’s different than the others, but what really bothers me is the archway on the opposite side. This clearing is wider, all grass, and has a massive set of walls. We could try to go around it, but the trees and plants are thicker, and from what I can see, it might be harder to make it through the garden area. I’m not certain what other traps might be in the wild section.”

“Worse than that poison fruit?”

Smiling at their caster, Max nodded. “I’m not sure anyone else except Fowl might survive an encounter with one of those. The initial damage was a lot, and the damage it wanted to do over time was draining, to say the least.”

Fowl joined the two of them near the arch leading into the clearing. “Tell me we can win, and I’ll joyfully charge that thing.”

“I’d like to say it should be easy, but that lizard mage was pretty bad. This thing is almost twice as tall, and those teeth in its flower area are bigger than Cordellia. Those vines for arms look like they can reach a decent way from its body and have some thorns that might puncture your armor.”

“Bah,” Fowl scoffed. “I doubt that. Besides, fire has to hurt it, right? You two have that on a lock.”

“The real problem is if we have to get past it to go on. We could go back, leave the tower, and wait for the timer to reset,” Max replied. “Those are days of doing other stuff and not being in here. What’s to say a worse floor or boss doesn’t stand in our way? At some point, we need just to keep pushing.”

“Does anyone want my opinion?” Cordellia asked.

The group turned and saw their archer shifting side to side a little bit.

“Always,” Max said, smiling at her. You’re part of the team; share your thoughts.”

Cordellia’s jaw seemed to relax at Max’s words. “I know you’re stronger than you want to share, and I respect that. Still, a creature this size has to come with some problems. I’ve read a few reports, and often, the size amplifies the strength of a monster. Like that first rare spawn lizard we fought. It sent Fowl flying with one hit.”

Fowl started to chuckle and nodded, making a whistling sound and using a hand to mimic his flight.

“I have no idea how strong or tough something like this can be, but reports always mention how bosses for levels five and nine are typically this size. Those things hit harder than everything else. Can you and Fowl really take that kind of punishment?”

“I’ve got all my cooldowns for my defense skills. Batrire has hers, so that should provide us with some help,” Fowl replied. “Seth has his even, which should give us even more chances to survive. Damage will be key.”

Max’s halberd appeared in his hand, and he spun it around. “I’ve got the best weapon I can think of for this thing.” A glow of fire covered the weapon as Max enchanted it with fire.

Fowl raced at the creature, which started to roar once he was within thirty yards of it, the vines on its body extending about fifteen yards from its massive stem. They whipped around and shifted quickly, waiting to strike at the dwarf who was coming toward it.

Tanila, Batrire, and Cordellia were spread out slightly near the archway they had entered, trying to get close enough to attack while staying far enough away to avoid being attacked.

“It can’t move?!” Fowl called out as the creature seemed to wait, making the warrior slow down.

Max came to a stop from his charge a few yards behind Fowl and frowned. “That would be too easy!”

“Cast something and see!” Fowl yelled. “Better you than the others going first!”

Max grunted as he formed the tiniest firebolt and sent it hurtling toward the creature's stem. It impacted against the rough brown, black, and green exterior. Less than a second of fire burned before it went out, yet the creature’s flower head turned, two red eyes appearing above the mouth, locking onto Max. The eyes narrowed, and it roared, a barrage of seeds projected from its face area at Max.

His shield came up as he dodged to the side, seeds as large as a watermelon racing at him with sharp tips.

One of the seeds impacted his shield, while another caught his left leg. Knowing he couldn’t dodge it, Max twisted, trying to lessen the impact, and spun, still hearing a crunch as the seed shattered his femur.

[Regeneration]

Rolling and groaning from the damage, Max felt the healing spell of Batrire as his leg bone snapped together.

“Those are bad! Don’t get hit!” Max yelled as he jumped sideways on one leg, his other one almost healed enough to use.

Something under the ground began approaching, and Max’s sonar was warning him about it.

At the last second, he dove and rolled, a huge, spiked root coming from under the ground where he had been, piercing like a knife through the air before coming upwards about ten feet and retracting back inside.

More movement came, and the ground around the clearing rolled and moved slightly.

Turning to shout, Max saw the archways where the three women were standing glow, a barrier now blocking the entrance they had come through.

“Watch out for roots!” Max yelled. Seeing Fowl no longer waiting outside the area he had believed was safe.

Letting his sonar keep him from getting impaled, Max saw the three women starting to run, roots coming up from the ground where they had been a few seconds before.

It takes a little longer… maybe the distance…

A roar and howl came from near the plant, and Max saw Fowl trying to block and attack the vines that whipped at him. The vines struck his shield with a force that echoed in a way impossible to imagine.

Fowl’s health bar was going down, and the impact of the blows was taking a toll on him. The force was impossible to imagine, and time wasn’t on his side.

“Going all in!”

Running toward the creature, Max felt half a dozen roots coming at him as he moved, each one a second or two late in skewering him, the massive flower obviously not anticipating him running full speed toward it.

A giant fireball grew in the air, and Max let it go when he was about ten yards away. A stone ramp appeared as Max made a dash for the last few yards, eyeing the thick stem that was at least five feet wide.

[Fire Nova]

[Power Strike]

[Regeneration]

[Weakness]

[Evasion]

[Flurry]

[Berserker]

Max’s vision shifted as leaped through the air, dodging an attack from a vine that had tried to strike him. The red tint of unbridled rage filled Max, and his halberd cut through the air with the speed and power of an impossible combination for most to imagine.

As Max landed on the ground at the base of the stem, five strikes swung in rapid success.

The first blow landed, cleaving through the stem and cutting almost halfway through it. Black goo spurt from the wound, the body of the plant swaying as Max’s blade cleaved partially through the massive stem.

Another attack came as he spun, using the momentum to cleave again. Over and over, the blade of his weapon sent massive chunks of the boss’s stem flying, soon leaving only a gaping hole from the initial assault of the attack.

His Fire Nova went off, burning the base, roots, and vines, trying to get near the man who was somehow overcoming its defenses.

A root came from underneath, and the combination of evasion and sonar allowed Max, even in his Berserker state, to dodge the attack, hacking at the attacking root and cutting it in half.

Unable to notice what was going on around him, Max missed seeing a fireball from Tanila and a few arrows from Cordellia impact the boss’s face, hitting its eyes and distracting the plant.

Time passed quickly, and Max was almost done with his attack when a vine hit him from the right, sending him flying across the field.

The red vision faded, and the pain of the attack he had just suffered flooded his senses, making him gasp and regret that action because his ribs were broken and impaled in his lungs.

A heal came from Batrire, followed by her new heal over time, helping to minimize the pain as Regeneration caused his bones to start moving back into place.

Roots were coming for him, and Max staggered to his feet, his right arm crushed and his left shoulder socket popping back into place as he moved.

The roots continued to come as he zig-zagged back and forth around the clearing, dozens of them coming after him from under the ground.

Each step for the first ten seconds felt like agony as the jostling of his body made the bones that were joining back together take longer.

Twenty seconds after hitting the ground, his body was healed and ready for action again, but his weapon was lying in the dirt, close to the boss.

Fowl was yelling curses, trying to do damage, his new weapon creating a bleed effect of black goo with each strike but none of that seemed to matter compared to what he had done.

Fire and ice continued to bombard the boss, and Max saw that Tanila was almost out of mana, with only another spell or two left at most.

“Seth!”

Fowl’s cry caught his attention as he saw vines wrapped around his dwarven friend, trying to pick him up, failing because of the skill that the warrior had engaged.

Time was running out, and Max couldn’t wait.

[Haste]

Like an arrow fired from a bow, Max moved across the clearing, his speed so fast that Cordellia struggled to believe his actions were real.

Snatching his weapon from the ground, Max used the only thing he could think of.

No more big skills… need to use momentum.

Racing toward the plant, Max eyed the injured part of the stem. The front half was torn apart, but the back half held it upright, somehow able to support the massive weight of the top.

The sound of seeds pelting the ground behind Max made him grateful for the decision to use Haste, the plant bombarding its own roots.

Now running as fast as possible and seeing the boss’s vines coming for him, Max smiled as he tested the spell.

[Demonic Teleportation]

Seven yards from the boss, a portal was open for less than the blink of an eye, appearing directly behind the boss.

Somehow, Max’s brain was able to follow everything as the world shifted, his point of view no longer from before the creature but from behind. His eyes were still locked on the weak point of the stem.

Max planted his feet as he emerged from the portal and swung his weapon with all the speed and momentum he had. The blade delivered a massive blow to the stem, cutting two-thirds of the way through the remaining few feet.

A crack came, and the sound of horror and surprise emanated from above. The boss was shrieking at the realization of what had just happened.

Without waiting or giving it time to react, Max swung again and again, each strike destroying more and more of the remaining few inches supporting the boss’s upper half.

The stem began to lean toward the left, vines waving in the air as if trying to balance, but the weight of the top half was too much. Stress and overworked sections of the hardened and soft inside of the boss’s stem were at their limits, and Max’s final stroke severed it, sending the creature tumbling to the ground.

Fowl fell to the ground from about ten feet where the creature had been lifting the warrior up, his Armored Warrior skill no longer active.

Turning, Max saw the boss’s vines struggling to continue whipping around as massive torrents of black goo spewed from the base of the creature's severed stem, which was connected to its root system.

Unable to move, a horrible roar from the flower on its back filled the clearing.

“Go!” Max shouted at Fowl, struggling to get to his feet and limping a little bit.

Without hesitating, Max ran toward the boss, beginning the task of pruning the vines that were now aimlessly moving through the air.

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A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

From Londoner To Lord

[Isekai Kingdom-Builder]

This is a slow progression, kingdom-builder story, with a lot of focus on world-building and eventually, industrialization and tech-uplifting. The story is going to be very, very long. Settle in for a slow burn, where the journey is just as important as the destination. Welcome aboard!

Steven awakens to a nightmare. Transported to a brutal medieval kingdom on a faraway planet, he finds himself in the body of Kivamus, the exiled third son of a Duke. Banished to a crumbling frontier village called Tiranat, a bandit-ridden backwater located within untamed forests, Kivamus faces a harsh awakening as its newly made Baron.

Tiranat is a far cry from Steven's comfortable London life. Here, survival is a daily battle, resources are scarce, and technology is a distant dream. Yet, a flicker of hope remains for Kivamus - memories of a technologically advanced world.

Armed only with the ingenuity of a modern mind, Kivamus defies despair. He sees potential where the villagers only see struggle. He dreams of using his knowledge to forge a new future for Tiranat, a future fueled by industry, a concept alien to this medieval society.

But the path to progress is full of challenges. Navigating the cut-throat world of medieval politics, earning the wary trust of the villagers, and overcoming the limitations of a resource-scarce world are just the beginning.

This is the story of Kivamus, a man reborn, forced to carve a new destiny in a world both harsh and exhilarating.

But before anything else, he will recreate indoor plumbing, dammit!

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/87637/eidos-tamers-an-apocalyptic-litrpg-adventure

Cordellia still had an arrow ready even though Tanila had told her to stop attacking. Her mouth was open as she watched the human warrior dissecting the plant as if it were nothing more than a common flower in a garden.

A minute passed, and every vine from the creature was gone.

“He’s going to kill this almost by himself,” Cordellia said in awe. “How?”

“I can’t answer that,” Tanila replied as they both watched Max start to chop the petals off the boss's face. “He’s not like us, yet he’ll do whatever he must to protect you.”

Fowl made it to the group of three, standing about thirty yards from the carnage Max was creating.

“I like a good hug, but that thing was a bit too much,” Fowl joked, grunting when no one laughed as he hoped. “How long till that thing is dead?”

“I have no idea,” Batrire replied, “but he is harvesting the heck out of that thing. I’m not sure we’ll have enough space to bring all that back.”

“Sure we will,” Fowl declared. “These new storage devices have three times the space and weight. Everett might have a heart attack when he sees everything, though.”

A loud wail came and then stopped, experience flooding the four of them.

“Holy ogre nuts,” Cordellia cursed. “That was more than a pack of plants we killed in the other clearing.”

“Aye, level fifty-one now,” Fowl said happily. “It's time to decide how I want to present my points.”

“Stop yacking and come collect this stuff!” Max yelled at the group of three, grabbing a handful of petals and stacking them on each other.

The boss was gone before the three of them reached the corpse, replaced with a standard-sized green chest where the bottom half of the stem had been.

“That was impressive,” Cordellia stated as she started to pick up some of the vines and store them. “Tanila said you always wanted to be a gardener.”

Laughing, Max nodded and stuffed the pile of petals into a backpack he had brought out. “If a life of adventuring doesn’t work out, perhaps I can get a job taking care of overgrown plants.”

“You used everything?” Batrire asked as she grabbed a vine and dragged it over toward Fowl.

“As did Fowl,” Max replied. “Provided there aren’t any more bosses, we should be fine, but if so, we’ll have to leave and try again in a few days.”

Max saw Tanila opening the chest and watched her as she studied inside of it.

“Anything good?” Fowl asked as he stored the vine Batrire had brought him.

Tapping her lips with her finger, Tanila nodded. “I believe so. This chest is interesting, though, to say the least.”

Everyone groaned, and Tanila moved to join them in cleaning up the rest of the items Max had cut off the boss.

“One fricking item! You have got to be kidding me!”

Everyone ignored Fowl and his complaining, each staring at the item that was changing appearance. Occasionally, a green belt or a necklace, a bracer, and even a ring a few times.

“Two crystals and one random item. That does seem a bit unfair,” Max admitted. “Still, the two yellow gems should mean someone gets an upgraded skill sooner.”

“The best way to do this is everyone rolls,” Batrire stated. “No point trying to do it any other way for now.”

“You sure I should roll on this?”

“Everyone means everyone,” Max replied, nodding at Cordellia. “Get over the part where you don’t feel like one of us.”

She smiled and held her hand over the dimensional area.

Everyone touched the section, and each person’s face appeared on a die. It looked to have four of each person on it and started to twist and turn in the dimensional area, slowing down after a moment.

Max watched as everyone’s eyes were fixated on the results, knowing inside all of them was a desire to win and see what might come from it.

“Ockrim loves me!” Fowl shouted, dancing a small jig when the dice stopped spinning, and his bearded face appeared.

“Congrats, now take your prize and tell us what it is,” Max said as he retrieved the two massive yellow crystals.

Fowl reached in, took out the ring, and started to examine it. Green metal with what looked to be crafted as a twisted vine fashioned all around sat in the dwarf’s palm as he stared at it.

His eyes went wide, and he quickly slipped it onto his finger, smiling as he did.

“Well, you ogre nut, going to share?” Batrire asked, frowning at him.

“Yeah… I just wanted to see if I could tell a difference. It only offers five constitution points but grants a Rooted ability. It seems that I can use it and not be moved. It’s like my Armored Warrior, but different. I only get a two hundred percent bonus to defense, no extra bonus hit points, either. There is only an hour cooldown, too, which is a blessing compared to the cooldown on the Armored Warrior.”

Nodding, Max reached out and grabbed Tanila’s hand, leading her a little bit away from the others.

“Everything ok?”

He nodded and smiled. “I got six strength and constitution again. I have no other stats, but I won’t complain. I also have no skills, but part of me can see why that might not have happened.”

“Being a plant and all?”

“Yup,” Max replied, giving her a small kiss on her cheek. “Besides, I wanted to ask how Cordellia responded to that fight. I don’t like going all out like that, but this thing was far stronger than I imagined it would be. Even my best attack only cut halfway through it. I’m not certain how these things will measure up, but at some point, we will hit a roadblock. I’m certain of it.”

Tanila smiled and looked at their archer, talking with the other three. “She did fine, but she is overwhelmed. It's a lot between me being a princess and you soloing this boss that she and a normal party would struggle with. How long till you think we can do more?”

“You say that like you didn’t help against that boss,” Max replied. “You both played a huge role in that fight. Your spells kept it off of me for a bit.”

“Just remember to let everyone else play. Even Fowl gets flustered by not doing much. Eventually, we’ll have to fight and be at the top of our game.”

Max frowned and nodded, knowing Tanila was right.

“Fine, we can finish this floor and rest until all our cooldowns are done. Then we can see how things go as a group in the coming floors.”

Max pulled one more large pack to the group, killing over half of the seventy plants, trees, and mushrooms. They cleared out the rest of that path to find the exit to the tower's second floor.

“One day… we cleared a floor in one day,” Cordellia said again. “It’s a good thing we are going to rest a few days, or people might wonder what is happening with our group.”

“How long would your normal group have required for this floor?” Batrire asked as they stood near the portal, putting yellow gems equally into pouches.

“Three days without that boss. Two would have been pushing it. I’m not certain how Seth can just run past everything, but you can’t imagine the fear a normal party would have.”

“We’ll take care of a few other things as well. I got a few errands to run over the next few days anyways,” Max said. “The next question is who wants to upgrade their skill. Fowl and Batrire, you’re up. One of you picks who goes next and let Everett know.”

“What about you?” Cordellia. “Don’t you need to upgrade yours?”

“I always go last,” Max lied. “I can survive until we are all able to upgrade.”

She frowned but nodded.

Everyone took their pouches and started crushing the gems in their hands. Sighs and moans came as the power of each gem flooded their bodies, and by the end of it all, each of them had risen another tower level.

“That one percent seems nice,” Fowl said. “It's going to be really hard giving up seven percent when we reset back to level zero.”

“Why is why most don’t,” Cordellia stated as she finished crushing her gems. “Imagine the rare ones who actually make it to level fifty. Could you see them trying to give up those kind of bonuses?”

A thought hit Max as Cordellia said those things.

“Can someone give up all fifty tower levels at once?”

Max’s question caught everyone off guard, and he couldn’t help but smirk as they stared at him.

“You’d give up fifty percent bonuses for twelve and a half?! That seems insane to even imagine. If someone had one hundred in their constitution they would be giving up a third of their life!”

Bobbing his head, Max kept the same smirk as Cordellia ranted about that decrease.

“But it would make farming the levels easier,” Tanila said. “If things went well, you’d be close to level seventy-five, beat all the hard stuff, have all the better gear, and then descend upon the tower's lower levels, way stronger than before.”

Their archer's face went from confused and frustrated to in shock and awe in one moment.

"You're right," Max replied. "Imagine all the stats you gained through that point. I was doing some math, and maybe I'll share those numbers later, but if the gear scales, the stats continue to go up, and the truth is experience isn't the biggest problem but our stats, that would be the smartest way."

"That's how they bridge the gap!" Cordellia exclaimed loudly. "Those who fight in the fifties! Only a handful do that, but most can't make that jump! They aren't willing to give up that growth and regrind everything again."

Nodding, Max took a stick and drew a few lines in the dirt where the stone path ended before the swirling black portal.

"This line is your possible stats, and the one on the bottom is your level. As you gain both, the line travels like this."

Fowl watched momentarily and then shook his head before moving away from the others. "I don't like math; just tell me what to do, and I'll do it," he muttered.

Ignoring their dwarf warrior, Max marked where the line dropped down but less than half before rising quickly upward again. "If I'm right, and Tanila says I am, the actual loss will be less if we wait till fifty. Imagine then what we'll be able to do as a group."

Their archer tugged on her braid for a moment, trying to handle the overwhelming knowledge that suddenly made sense.

"Do you think Everett and Tom know this?" she asked,

"I do. Odds are they don't share it until someone actually reaches the fiftieth floor. It's far easier to convince someone to take that path when they see the truth instead of having an impossible mountain to climb beforehand."

Fowl's stomach growled, and everyone turned to see his face turning slightly red. "Sorry, a bit hungry."

"Let's go, and we can discuss things back at the faction house," Max said. "Besides, we need to turn in everything we have and acquire these reports from Everett and Tom. I don't want to miss out on knowing something about what we will face."

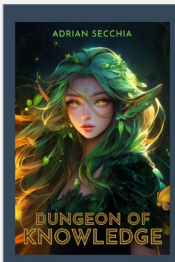
Everyone nodded and turned, going out the portal first, leaving Max standing there for a moment by himself.

Glancing up at the sun-filled sky of the tower floor, he couldn't help but wonder what the last floor would be like. No one seemed to know or was willing to share, and the thought of it sent chills down his spine.

174 - Becoming Someone New

174 - Becoming Someone New - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES



Dungeon of Knowledge [Raid combat litRPG]

Aliandra Amariel loved magic, dedicating her academic years to the study of runes and spells, pushing the boundaries of mana's infinite possibilities. Like most Fae, her destiny seemed clear until that fateful day of her Class Trial, when the Blind Lich unleashed an undead apocalypse on her home, the fabled underground city of Dal'mohra, and triggered The Breaking – a cataclysm that forever reshaped the world.

Saved by her mother's legendary time-stasis spell, Ali wakes thousands of years into a dark future. Everything she knew and loved is gone, buried under a mountain, transformed into a twisted dungeon by the malevolent will of the Lich.

Now, Ali must confront her deepest fears, mastering the arts of battling monsters and braving a town riddled with corruption. As the Lich's grand design shadows her every move, she scrambles to forge new friendships and unearth ancient knowledge in her fight for survival.

Why must she struggle? All she had ever wanted was to curl up in a comfy chair with a few thousand good books. But the immortal Lich is drawn to her unique magic, ever hungry for more power to fuel his cold-hearted ambitions.

How will she survive the giant target painted on her back as her advancement slowly reveals the horrifying truth of the Class she chose to save herself? Will she falter, forced into the eternal servitude of undeath, or will she rise against all odds and cast him down, ridding the world of his evil?

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/80744/dungeon-of-knowledge-raid-combat-litrpg

Everett was shocked to hear they had defeated the second floor already. The team arrived just in time for dinner. None of them had kept track of the number of hours they had been inside.

Once they had eaten and gotten a chance to meet with a few of the other faction members not currently in the tower, Max and the rest retired for the night, looking forward to a few days off and some planning.

“Are you okay?” Tanila asked as she ran her finger across Max’s bare chest. “You seem distracted.”

He turned and smiled, kissing her softly on her forehead. “I am, just considering things about the floor. I showed you the journal, and I’m keeping track of everything. Part of me wants to know why the fiftieth floor is the cut-off zone for so many, and I also want to know how easy we can expect our second run through the first fifty floors to be.”

Tanila chuckled and gently pinched him. “You say that this is a certain thing, that we are guaranteed to make it.”

Bobbing his head, Max shifted so that he was facing Tanila, staring into her green eyes as her red hair sprawled all over her back and shoulders.

“Do you doubt that we will reach the fiftieth floor?”

She took a deep breath and slowly let it out, studying Max’s intent gaze. “I don’t doubt it, but I also don’t want us to be stupid and rush into things we aren’t prepared for. At some point, we must ask ourselves if those rare spawns are worth it.”

Frowning, Max knew that question would keep coming up.

“Do we want the items that will help us reach the top?”

Tanila sighed and nodded.

“I agree there may come a time for us to have to skip something, but if we look at the gains we have gotten from the risks we took, there has to be a reason. A ten percent ring was given to everyone!” he exclaimed quietly. “That alone is worth ten levels of tower experience! The power of your spells saw a massive jump from that one item alone!”

She nodded and found no good response to Max’s argument.

“Do you think we can still trust that the gods are blessing you?”

“Right now, that is the one thing that is keeping me pressing forward. After the dragon and demon dungeon, I know someone is. What really scares me is what will come when someone finds out who I am. If they attempt to hurt you or the others–”

Tanila put a finger on Max’s lip, stopping his rant about a topic that always got him upset. “Let it go. Remember, you are not alone, and we are not weak. They won’t have to deal with just you.”

Kissing her finger, Max closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths, letting the frustration leave as much as possible.

“You’re right… as always.”

She nodded and winked, rolling over. “I know. Now, get some rest. We got a lot to do.”

“A magical disguise, you say?” Firbina asked, tugging gently on her orange beard. “Are we talking about something more than just making people look away from you and not recognizing who you are?”

Max nodded, glad that the dwarf owner hadn’t forgotten who he was and seemed excited to help him out.

“I know this might sound weird, but I don’t need to change a lot. Maybe just something that makes me have hair on my head and my face. Eyes that are the same color. Stuff like that. And change my voice as well.”

She nodded, and Max saw her as she started staring off to the side a little, eyes darting between things. A small case suddenly appeared in her hand.

It had a pair of eyes drawn on it, each of them shut. The small wooden case didn’t look impressive, but Max could almost feel the power coming from inside it.

“Do we need to talk price beforehand?” Firbina asked as she opened it up.

“What? No deal for your favorite arena combatant?” Max replied with a wink. “How much are you thinking?”

“I’ve got three different ones, but for what you want, I’m going to say it will be this necklace.”

She pulled from the case a long silver necklace wrapped around a black crystal with a single white line running through it.

“This will last for up to a week of constant use. For every minute used, it requires two minutes to recharge. The big problem is that you cannot keep it in dimensional storage during that time. It has to be left somewhere else in the world. This one will run you two hundred gold coins.”

Max couldn’t help the cough that came, even though he had prepared himself for the cost.

“And if I wanted something that never ran out of time?”

Firbina began to laugh and shake her head. “That’s not something I sell, and most couldn’t ever hope to afford. Kings and Queens play with those rare items, but you would probably need at least fifty thousand gold, and even then, they wouldn’t sell it. The kind of power to sustain an illusion like that forever is immense.”

Pulling four coin bags from storage, Max tried to ignore the puckering sensation he felt below. Everett had given him three hundred gold, not asking too many questions about why he needed such a large amount.

He applauded my waiting to ask until after I had given the crystals and materials from the second floor.

“You don’t play around, do you?” the dwarf said with a smile. “Now then, let me show you how to use this, and we’ll go from there. Anything else you need?”

Shaking his head, Max fought back the grin that wanted to take over his face.

One step down, one more to go.

“You don’t look like a weaponsmith,” the dwarf stated as he studied the brown hair, brown-eyed human before him. “You certain you know what you’re doing?”

Max smiled and nodded, pointing at the materials in the back of the weaponsmith's shop. “As I said, I’ll gladly pay for my own materials and use of a station. I can’t promise I’ll be here often as I’m traveling with some family, but I’d like to practice some while here.”

The dwarf frowned, rubbing his dirty hands through his black beard, and finally nodded.

“Twenty silver per day, plus the cost of materials. Did you bring an apron and tools?”

Max nodded, pulling the apron from his storage and slipping it over his head.

The dwarf’s eyes twinkled at the sight of a young boy with storage and claiming to want to practice.

“Joshua, perhaps we need to rediscuss the price if you’re using one of those,” Zach said, chuckling slightly.

“Now, that wouldn’t be right, especially since it’s my father's,” Max replied. “Regardless, here is enough for two days, and I’m assuming the ingredients I’m going to use.”

The pouch he handed Zach made the dwarf’s eyes gleam and a grin appear.

“Okay, go have fun, but remember, if you break it or ruin it, I’ll make sure you pay!”

Nodding, Max moved to the forge area that Zach had pointed him at. All around the shop were eight forges, six currently in use by various dwarves and humans. The sound of bellows and hammers striking metal filled the air. The heat would be oppressive to many, but Max didn’t even seem to notice as the stats he had made the heat of the forges nothing more than a warm breeze. The air coming through from the open sides and giant doors helped make the area less stuffy and stale.

“Need help, sir?”

Max turned to see a young boy about the age of sixteen, sporting a little more muscle and a few burns, coming up to him.

“Working on your skill for choosing day?” Max asked, smiling at the red-headed teen.

“Yes, sir! I can work the bellows if you want and help as well!”

“What’s your name? I’m Joshua.” Max asked as he held out his hand.

“Brian, sir!”

“Enough, sir,” Max said with a grin, pointing at the forge Zach had given him to use. “I’ll be over here, but if you want, you’re more than welcome to come help me.”

The boy nodded, ran over to the forge, and saw the coals' temperature.

“I’ll get them heated if you need!”

Max nodded, putting the tools he had down, all wrapped in a leather cloth on a table. “Sounds good. I’ll be back. I want to see what kind of materials Zach has.”

The boy nodded, not saying another word, and was already starting the pump. The coals were starting to glow from the air he was forcing over them.

A few minutes later, in the area where a female dwarf watched everything he touched, Max found a few metal ingots ready to go and held them up for the woman to see. She nodded, and he put them in storage, watching her eyebrows raise as she sat forward, the book she was holding not as interesting anymore.

There were a couple of different types of wood already cut and carved out for handles of different sizes, and Max took two, knowing they would work for what he wanted right now.

Simple daggers, learn the process before trying to go all big.

The choice of the metal and the wood seemed easy, as his mind told him which ones were better. He knew that one ingot wasn’t perfect and that three of the precut pieces of wood had flaws.

Armed with that knowledge and some supplies, Max moved back to his area of the forge, ready to see what he could do.

Time had passed faster than Max had realized. The process itself was calming, heating, pounding, stretching, heating, and repeating over and over.

His skill told him where to hit and how to hit. The hammer felt perfect in his hand, and before Max knew it, the first dagger was ready to be quenched. The steam and fire from the oil, as it hissed, washed over his arm.

“You ok?” Brian called out over the noise.

Nodding, Max waited as long as he knew it needed, pulling the dagger from the oil and smiling. “The fire and steam aren’t that bad. After a while, you’ll get used to it.”

Brian made a face of disbelief, pointing to the burns and scars on his forearms and hand. “I’ll take your word for that, sir!”

“Ever made a grip?”

Shaking his head, Brian moved to the bench Max motioned to.

Setting the blade down on the bench and removing the tongs from it, Max began to show the red-headed teen how to measure and craft a handle for the dagger. The blade was nine inches long, and the balance was perfect so far. Once it was ground, sharpened, oiled, and finished, it would be worthy of an adventurer.

Max found himself smiling and laughing as he listened to Brian ask questions that he was able to answer even though he had never forged a weapon in his life.

His skill taught him everything he needed to know. With his strength and dexterity, Max was able to make mountains move in moments, shaping and crafting in a way that most couldn’t imagine possible.

Soon, two pieces of wood were perfectly cut and ready to be glued and hammered into the gap between the disc guard he had made. A small pined pommel would tap on top, and he could easily hammer the block into place.

Once the blade was set with the disc guard and everything was ready, Max used a smaller hammer, driving the metal piece into the tang.

He had ignored the looks from the other weaponsmiths, choosing to shape the wood now. Max went to work with the blade secured in a clamp, letting his skill guide him as the chisels took off just the right amount of wood, crafting the perfect shape and adding small lines to help hold the blade if it got wet.

Stepping back, he smiled and saw that all he needed to do now was sand down the wood and apply some oil. Before that would happen, he went to where the large grinding and sharpening section was.

“Brian, if you would,” Max motioned to the wheels.

The young redhead sprung into action, working the pedals and watching as Max began sharpening and finishing the dagger.

Giving the weapon one last wipe with the cloth, Max smiled and knew the blade was complete.

[10 Experience Gained]

[Rare Weapon Created]

[Choose a stat to grant a bonus to]

Max couldn’t believe his eyes at the sight of those notifications.

Ten experience?! At that rate, it would only take one hundred more of these for a level!

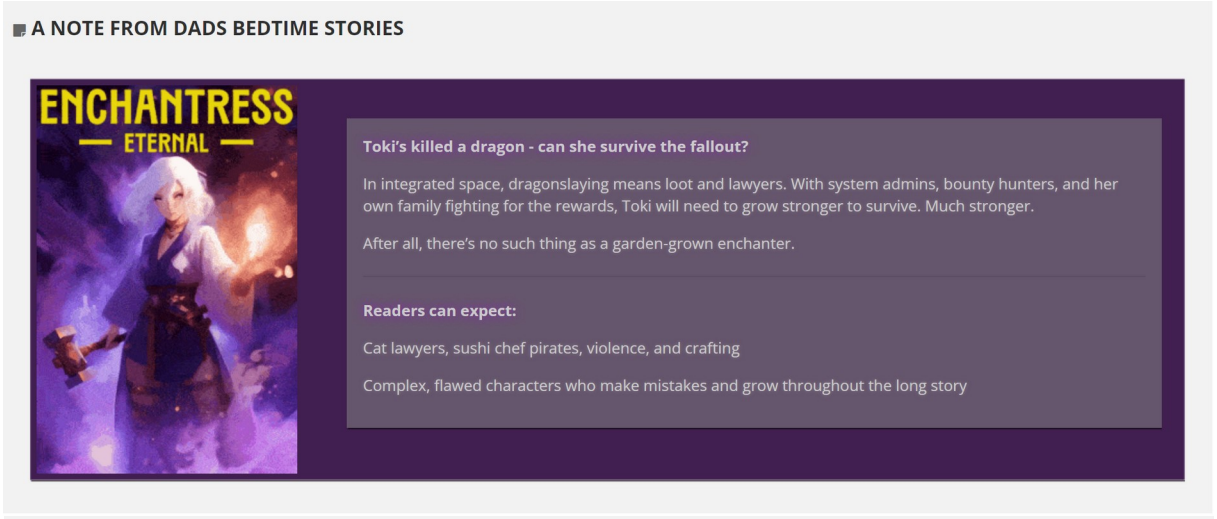
Glancing up from the dagger, Max saw Zach and Brian both staring at him.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

JUST a heads up - Book 3 will be stubbed at end of month for July 1st release on Amazon Kindle!

Hope everyone is doing great - been a busy month!

175 - Learning to Craft175 - Learning to Craft - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road


A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES
ENCHANTRESS
ETERNAL
Toki’s killed a dragon - can she survive the fallout?
In integrated space, dragonslaying means loot and lawyers. With system admins, bounty hunters, and her own family fighting for the rewards, Toki will need to grow stronger to survive. Much stronger.
After all, there’s no such thing as a garden-grown enchanter.
Readers can expect:
Cat lawyers, sushi chef pirates, violence, and crafting
Complex, flawed characters who make mistakes and grow throughout the long story

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/87034/enchantress-eternal

“I’ve never seen something so amazing,” Brian muttered as he looked at the weapon in Max’s hand. “I mean, I’ve seen a lot in the half year I’ve been here, but that’s a totally different quality.”

The dwarf cleared his throat, and the young teen almost lept out of his boots, surprised that the shop's owner was so close.

“I’ll agree,” Zach said. “You told me you were traveling and wanted to practice, not show off. I have lots of questions, but I somehow doubt I’ll get answers to any of them.”

Shrugging, Max put the dagger into his storage and smiled.

“You would be right about that,” Max said. “I want to try a few more things, and then I’ll be gone for a few days. Maybe even a week.”

Stroking his beard, Zach stared at the boy before him, knowing that his appearance of youth, combined with a skill like his, wasn’t very common. Lots of questions came to his mind, but none of them had answers he really wanted to ask, knowing the danger in those truths.

“I don’t suppose you want to keep using the materials in the back with my daughter. Do you want better quality items or what?”

“You and I both know some of those ingots need a little more time to get all the impurities out,” Max said quietly, not worrying about being heard over the building's noise. “The wood handles have some flaws, too, but most should be able to learn that by now.”

Zach smirked and nodded. “So what are you wanting? Better bars? Higher quality metal? More expensive wood or tusks for a handle?”

Glancing at the boy waiting off to the side, occasionally giving the coals a breath of air to keep them warm if needed, Max scratched the hair on his face.

I know it's not there, but it itches like it is.

“That Brian kid, is he really going to be a weaponsmith?
Zach glanced at the red-headed teen and then nodded. “He’s been here almost every day almost since he could. The kid’s got dreams of being something famous, but I try to warn him this life isn’t like that.”

Max couldn’t help but chuckle and nod. The time it would take for a human to reach the level of renown as a weaponsmith was almost impossible. He would have to be leveled his entire life and have someone willing to invest in him.

“What kind of metal do you have that would make a good hammer for smithing? Something special for that boy?”

Zach studied Max for a moment and then cocked his head.

“Are you offering to make him a smithing hammer?”

“Maybe, would that bother you?”

Snorting, Zach shook his head in disbelief. “I just watched you make something I know I can’t make, and you’re offering to make a kid with no future outside of this profession a hammer. We’ll ignore my jealousy, and even if you make him one, are you sure it's worth the cost of items?”

Max nodded. “Something tells me that boy will be forever bound to you if you keep doing what you’re doing. He needs focus and a place. You’re giving him those things, even if he has to work by the sweat of his brow for it. Besides, I want to make sure the next generation of weaponsmiths has a good start if I can help.”

Roaring in laughter, Zach held his stomach and belly laughed for a bit. After wiping a tear away, the dwarf shook his head.

“Next generation… come on now son, you’re barely old enough to be off your mother's teat, let alone talking like that.”
“So tell me then,” Max said, ignoring the dwarf's joke or the fact that he was right about Max’s age. “What metal do you have I can purchase to make him something?”

Frowning, Zach rubbed his face for a moment as he thought.

“I got something, but it would cost you ten gold for the amount you need, and that’s just for the metal. You’d need something stronger than standard wood for the handle.”

Max nodded. “I got that taken care of. I’ll take the metal.”

The dwarf’s head snapped back so fast that Max was afraid he’d break it. “You want it?”

“I do.”

Reaching into his storage, Max began collecting coins, keeping them hidden in his hand till he motioned toward the bench.

With the two of them huddled together, Max showed Zach the coins and saw the dwarf start to sputter.

“Mah… why… uh… blast you fool. You’re serious!”

“Completly,” Max replied. “Do you have the metal on you?”

Nodding, the dwarf pulled from his inventory a pack and set it on the bench with a thud. He pulled out two large ingots, a blue glint to the metal, and set them down on the table. “Listen, if this doesn’t work out, don’t blame me, but please don’t tell that boy you’re doing anything until you hand him that hammer.”

Handing the money to Zach, Max picked up one of the ingots, his mind and skill already knowing what it was.

[Blue Dwarf Steel]

“Memories of your homeland?”

Zach was putting the coins away when he froze, turning his head to look at Max in surprise. “You know what that is… I… Can I trouble you by making me something down the road? No cost for ingredients?”

Running his hands through his hair, Max nodded.

“Only if you don’t tell a soul who I am and why I’m here. Keep that a secret, and after I make your newest apprentice something, I’ll make you one, too.”

Faster than Max could blink, Zac spit on his hand and held it out for Max.

Repeating the gesture, they shook, and the dwarf appeared giddy as a kid for a moment.

“Anything you need, even my help, you ask,” Zach said. “I’ll keep the rest away.”

Nodding, Max watched as the dwarf took his sack and stored it.

Brian stood there watching Max, enthralled by how he and the dwarf that often made his life difficult had seemed so chummy.

“Brian, come here.”

The teen was standing by the bench in a moment.

“You see this? It’s not normal metal, and we’re going to do something different than usual. Are you up for that?”

Brian glanced at Zach, who was gone, checking in on the other forges. Looking at Max, who was smiling, he couldn’t help but stammer.

“Why do I have a weird feeling about that question?”

Putting a hand on the boy's shoulder, Max gave it a squeeze. “You want to be a weaponsmith, right?”

The boy nodded immediately. “All I ever wanted!”

“Good. I’ll help you as much as I can. Together, we’re going to make something, but in order for what I want to happen, you’ll have to trust me. Do you think you can do that?”

“Whatever you say, Mr. Joshua!” exclaimed Brian.

Laughing, Max pulled out the blade he had just made and smiled.

“Ok then. Let me see your hand. I need to make a cut.”

As the night wore on, the sun set, and the shop was empty except for Brian and Zach. The two worked side by side with Max, watching in awe as every time the hammer struck, it seemed to form the head of the hammer perfectly.

Zach had actually given Max more metal than he needed, obviously expecting Max to waste most of it. Instead, it would be just enough for two hammers, but first, Brian would get his.

Max’s skill told him how to hammer and where to hold it. He had already punched the spot for the handle, smiling to himself for keeping a branch from the drops in the tower. What he was creating would be something of legend one day.

With the hammerhead just hot enough on the side, Max smiled.

“Zach, hold this for me, I need to etch it. Brian, watch what I’m doing.”

The dwarf gasped for a moment, but he didn’t hesitate when Max handed the tongs off, returning to the table for a chisel and hammer.

With the head on the anvil, Max began working on the lines, carving a rune he knew in his mind. Somehow, knowledge he hadn’t known before was there, ready for him to draw upon.

Multiple trips into the coals were required before it was finished, and then Max took over, holding the piece once more and watching it.

It took a while, and Brian fell asleep while Max and Zach continued tempering before hardening the hammer. When it rested, Max got to work on the wood he was going to use for the handle. The knife he had just created worked perfectly for trimming the wood, whittling it down. In his mind, he saw how to prepare the last piece, taking the pin he had already created and preparing for the last part.

“Wake him up,” Max said, his eyes red, surprised at how well Zach was doing. It was hours past midnight, and yet the moment was almost done.

“Come here, Brian, I need one last thing. I have to cut you once more.”

The boy didn’t wince as Max cut his finger and drew on the rune and shaft of the handle. Like a sponge, the blood was absorbed by both, and Max took a cloth and wiped everything else off.

The hammer looked rough, like one that wasn’t designed for battle, but it was never intended to look like a work of art. Instead, it would pound metal into something better than itself.

[10 Experience Gained]

[Epic Hammer Created]

[Bonded]

[+ 5 STR/DEX/CON]

[20% Chance to create a weapon a grade higher]

[Indestructible]

Max couldn’t help but smile as he held the hammer for a moment, feeling it pull itself toward the young man next to him.

“This is yours. Do not share it with anyone or ever sell it.”

Holding the hammer out toward Brian, Max waited.

The red-headed teen stood there in the light of the dying forge, seeing Max smile and Zach standing with his mouth open. His hands trembled as he tried to reach for it.

“You’re certain?” he asked.

Nodding, Max held it closer. This time, the boy didn’t hesitate, instead grabbing the hammer, and Max felt his hand almost blown off of the weapon.

He swung it around a few times, amazed at how balanced it was.

“Brian, listen to me,” Max said in a firm tone.

The teen turned his attention off of the item in his hand and to the man who had made it for him.

“No matter what, never share its stats. Do not tell a soul. Not even to Zach. Do you understand?”

The boy nodded, and Max couldn’t help but smile, realizing he still hadn’t checked the stats.

“Gods… that hammer looks plain, but I know it’s not… and that rune…” Zach said, shaking his head from side to side. “You’re far more talented than you told me.”

Chuckling, Max gave a wink and moved to the table, starting to put away his tools and items.

“I’ll be back. Maybe tomorrow or in a week, but just know when I return, I’ll make sure you get yours.” Looking over his shoulder, Max gave Zach a hard stare. “Remember what we agreed upon.”

“Absolutely!” Zach exclaimed. He moved to where Brian was, staring at the hammer as if in a dream. “Son, listen to me. How would you like to be my apprentice?”

Brian’s red locks of hair shook from the force of the boy's head snapping toward the dwarf. “Mr. Zach, you’re serious?! I’m not even been gifted–”

Holding his hand up, Zach smiled and nodded. “Listen, son. Something tells me that come choosing day, you’re going to find yourself given the weaponsmith skill. When that happens, you’ll have a place here for as long as you want.”

Grinning from ear to ear the boy forgot where he was and rushed forward, hugging the sweaty and soot-covered dwarven man, jumping up and down excitedly.

The older dwarf patted the boy on the back a few times and laughed.

“Go ahead and turn in, I’ll clean up the shop.”

Max smiled and moved toward the door that was still open, allowing a gentle breeze into the shop. “You two get some rest. I’ll see you soon enough.”

After Max was gone, both men stood there for a moment, staring at the one who had been there all day.

“Who was that man?” Brian asked.

Zach chuckled and scratched his beard a few times, shaking his head slightly. “Son, I have no idea, but something tells me a god was in our midst…” He turned to Brian and pointed a stubby finger at him, poking him softly in the chest. “You do what he said now. Never tell anyone where you got that other than it was a gift, and never tell them its stats. Not even me. Understand?”

Bobbing his head, Brian realized he felt amazing as he held his hammer.

176 - Always The Nice Guy

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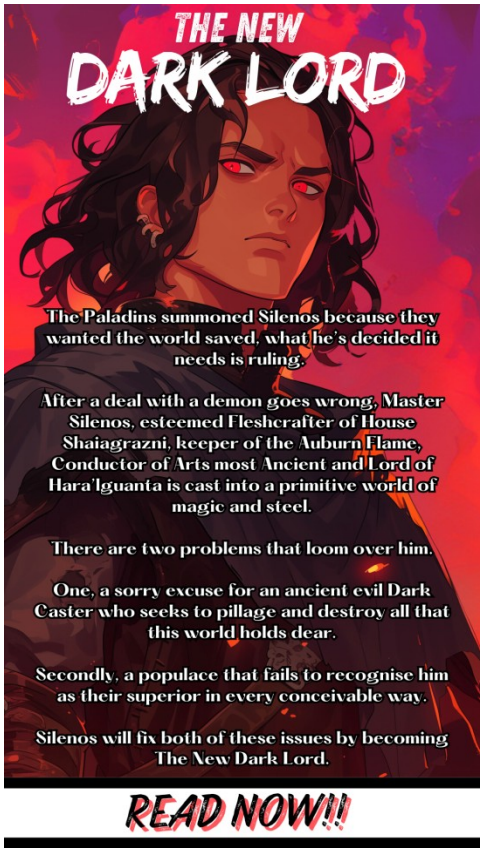
A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


THE NEW
DARK LORD
The Paladins summoned Silenos because they wanted the world saved, what he's decided it needs is ruling.
After a deal with a demon goes wrong, Master Silenos, esteemed Fleshcrafter of House Shaiagrazni, keeper of the Auburn Flame, Conductor of Arts most Ancient and Lord of Hara'lguanta is cast into a primitive world of magic and steel.
There are two problems that loom over him.
One, a sorry excuse for an ancient evil Dark Caster who seeks to pillage and destroy all that this world holds dear.
Secondly, a populace that fails to recognise him as their superior in every conceivable way.
Silenos will fix both of these issues by becoming The New Dark Lord.
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The Paladins summoned Silenos because they wanted the world saved, what he’s decided it needs is ruling.

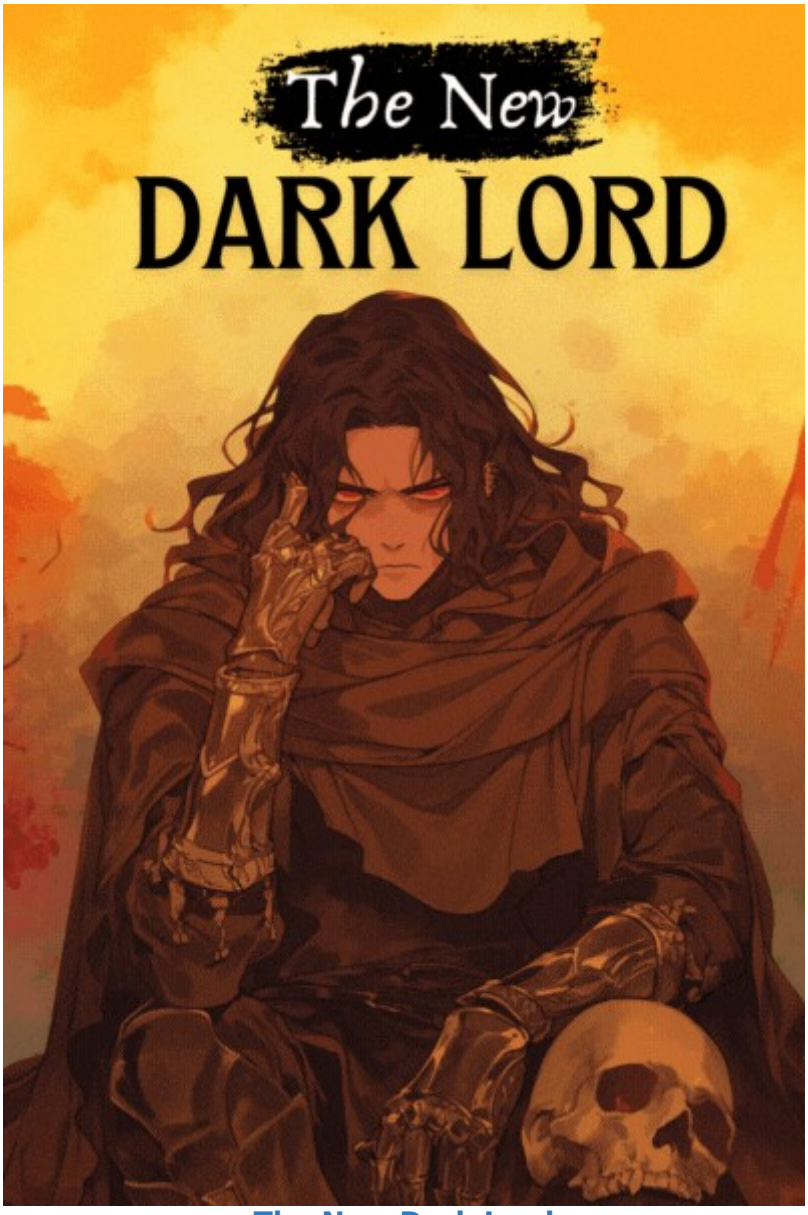
After a deal with a demon goes wrong, Master Silenos, esteemed Fleshcrafter of House Shaiagrazni, keeper of the Auburn Flame, Conductor of Arts most Ancient and Lord of Hara’lguanta is cast into a primitive world of magic and steel.

There are two problems that loom over him.

One, a sorry excuse for an ancient evil Dark Caster who seeks to pillage and destroy all that this world holds dear.

Secondly, a populace that fails to recognise Silenos as their superior in every conceivable way.

Silenos will fix both of these issues by becoming **The New Dark Lord.**



The New Dark Lord

by Of Ranting and Ramblings

Fiction Page **<---> *Start Reading***

Exhausted, Max fell asleep the moment his head hit the pillow.

Tanila understood and agreed to the plan even if she didn't like it. With the skills he now possessed and the items waiting to be crafted, Max needed to learn how it worked so that he could actually attempt crafting the dragon tooth.

“It’s about time you woke up.”

Max smiled and nodded, sensing Tanila sitting in a chair reading a book from across their room.

“How did it go?”

Sitting up, Max rubbed his eyes and turned to see her relaxing on the padded chair. Her red hair wasn’t in a braid yet, and every time he saw it undone, it always made his heart beat a little faster.

“Better than I expected,” he replied as he got up from the bed. “I need to go once more sometime soon and finish an item for someone, but I made a rare and epic item.”

Tanila’s eyebrows raised as she watched Max start to pull some clothes out of a drawer of the dresser near the bed.

“Already? That seems hard to believe for your first two times.”

“It really wasn’t me doing anything. The skill told me exactly how and where to do everything. Combined with my strength and dexterity, nothing seemed impossible. I think I finally realize why the tooth doesn’t do much right now. I know I need items that will combine with the tooth and even better ones to somehow forge it.”

Tanila stood up as Max was getting dressed and talking to her. Slipping her arms around his waist as he pulled his shirt over, she gently bit his ear. “What are we going to do with two more days to ourselves? Surely you could find some time to take me into the city for a nice meal—unless you’re ashamed of me.”

Groaning, Max spun in her arms and encircled her with his. Now, why would I ever be ashamed of you? I think we can make that happen tonight if you want. We won’t even invite Batrire or Fowl—just the two of us.”

She smiled and nodded, winking at him for a moment before gently pushing back from him. “I’ll hold you to that. Now, then, tell me what you plan on doing for the rest of the day.”

Max tried to read her expression, but Tanila had mastered the art of giving no clues. Her face looked like she didn’t have a care in the world. The slight curve of her lips, the loose jaw muscles, and eyes that seemed to just be waiting for his words flustered his attempts at not messing up.

“Perhaps you and Batrire could find somewhere in town to get a massage and your hair and nails done before dinner? I know you two haven’t had any real girl time either.”

She shook her head and smiled, unable to hold back the grin that always made her look amazing. “Seth, you’re a rare breed… I know that you probably picked that option for more than one reason, but I’ll gladly take you up on it. Should I guess where you’ll be headed in the meantime?”

Shaking his head, Max gave her a kiss. “It would be better if you didn’t, but be ready by four. I’ll be here to ensure we have a place for us.”

Letting him go, Tanila sighed, knowing his mind was currently on crafting.

“Fine, but you better not be late, or there will be hell to pay.”

Grabbing his necklace from the dresser, Max nodded and moved for the door.

“Just be ready at four!”

Delegation was becoming one of Max’s strong suits as he had Everett’s secretary getting a reservation for him and Tanila tonight as well as a cart. His outfit for special occasions was in his storage, and only needed a blink of an eye to be dressed.

With those things taken care of, he was out the door and soon darted down alleys, changing his appearance and outfit and making his way quickly to Zach’s forge.

The hours had gone by quickly, and Zach had given Max access to his own private forge in the back. Brian was bubbling with excitement at another chance to watch and work with him. Soon, the afternoon was passing, and Max was almost done with the process.

“Last cut,” Max said as Zach held out his finger.

The dwarf didn’t react as the blade cut his skin, blood coming freely from the wound, and Max put it on the metal and shaft. He had skipped the rune this time, wanting instead to see what else would happen. Working the metal, the skill had led him in a different direction, and as he was still learning to trust it, only time would tell how it impacted the final part. Instead, he had infused fire magic into the hammer, watching as it poured from his hand into the metal. It had sped up the process, requiring less time reheating the metal and tempering it.

[5 Experience]

[Rare Hammer Created]

[Bonded]

[+ 5 STR/DEX/CON]

[Worked metal cools at -50% normal rate]

[Indestructible]

Max smiled, seeing that a hammer like this would be a boon for any weaponsmith. Not needing to reheat it as often would provide a better return for Zach.

He handed the dwarf the finished work and smiled.

“As promised. I think you might find this to be worthy of our bargain.”

The dwarf began to gasp and grunt, words trying to form as he saw the stats and enchantment on it.

“Joshua… I… this… it’s too much…” His eyes were wide, and his strong hand shook as he held the hammer.

“Keep serving Ockrim, and do not forget that promise you made. Those two things are worth everything,” Max replied, giving the dwarf’s shoulder a solid pat. “Now, if you two will excuse me, I need to leave.”

“What about your tools?” Brian called out as Max started to walk off, leaving the ingredients and tools still on the bench.

“You can have them!” Max shouted as he moved toward the doorway. “Just remember to pay it forward!”

Both the young teen and the older dwarf stood there slack-jawed, watching Max walk away, a leather tarp falling back into place over the exit.

It took a few moments for the two of them to come to their senses, and Zach quickly stored his hammer and gave the red-headed boy a gentle pat on the back.

“Someday when you’re famous, remember this moment. The gods themselves came and blessed us both.”

Max was rushing around town. He still had time, and there were a few things he needed to finish doing. The flowers he had picked out were ready, and he paid, tipping well and earning a deep bow from the florist. A small treat of candy was already tucked away, and all that was needed was a quick wash before he was ready for his date.

Striding along the street, Max felt something odd. His mind was preoccupied with the date, but after the last two blocks, he was certain someone was following him.

On the crowded sidewalks, a man was behind him, moving with a gait that told Max all he needed to know. Whoever it was didn’t walk like most. Instead, they were confident in themselves, each step perfectly placed as they moved. If they dodged someone, there was never a moment they didn’t keep their balance.

Spotting a building up ahead on the right, Max quickened up his pace, noticing his tail was staying with him, stride for stride. The perfume shop came closer, and Max entered immediately, using the chance to gaze back over his right shoulder as if nothing was out of the ordinary, yet no one was there.

He could sense the man, still where he had been, frozen in place and shifting around the moving people on the sidewalk, yet no one was to be seen.

Going inside without hesitating longer, Max let the door shut behind him.

He picked up a few of the bottles near the window that looked outside, ignoring the worker coming toward him, and pretended to sniff them, eyes always glancing carefully at the passing crowd. No one walked by the front. Whoever the man was, they were waiting, obviously watching from outside. His sonar didn’t pierce the walls of the place, and it left him blind to what might be waiting for him.

“How can I help you, sir?”

Spinning around, Max moved from the windows, walking along the wall of the shop and smiling at the elf. He was dressed in nice clothes and wore a very clean apron.

“I’m looking for a perfume for a female friend. An elf woman. Any recommendations?”

The man smiled, nodding as he motioned Max toward the counter. “I have a few that might be just perfect. Describe her to me, and I’ll help you find the matching scent.”

Ten minutes later, Max had a tiny bottle of perfume and was moving out the door to the alley. The elf had been a little confused about the request, but Max’s story of making sure he wasn’t seen leaving so as to ruin the surprise was more than enough, combined with a few extra silvers to be shown a different way out.

As the door’s lock clicked behind him, Max entered Stealth and moved quickly down the alley. No one was close that he could see, but he didn’t want to take a chance. Too many things about what he felt were bothering him, and there was no time for risks.

I can’t get into another fight in the city… the guards would probably kick me out if that happened.

Maneuvering through the maze of alleys, Max let stealth fall and ran, bounding off one wall and then against the side of another building, parkouring up the sides until he was on the roof. From up here, he would stand out, but he didn’t care, running and jumping along the buildings with ease until he was a few more streets along.

Dropping to the ground and entering stealth once more, Max made his way to a different side street, activating his disguise necklace and choosing to have blond hair this time.

“Is everything ok?”

Max nodded at Tom who was watching a few of the Faction members that were training. The older man had seen him coming and could tell something was up by how he walked.

“Nothing, I hope. Just felt like I was being followed.”

Tom frowned at Max’s reply. “What do you mean by felt?”

Taking a deep breath and letting it out, Max motioned for Tom to stay put. He then moved behind the older man. “You know I’m here, but can you feel me?”

Bobbing his head, Tom turned and smiled. “You have a warrior's perception. That usually comes way later in the tower, but as always, I shouldn’t be surprised that you already possess it. What was it that you felt?”

“A person was following me, but when I turned to enter a building and checked to see who it was without showing my hand, no one was there. I could still feel them but–”

Tom’s face went white, which was not something Max expected, stopping him mid-sentence.

“You couldn’t see them but were certain they were there?”

The tone of Tom’s voice told Max something wasn’t right.

“I’d bet five hundred gold they were there, watching me. I left the building through a side door, not wanting to risk anything, and made my way here a different way. Why? What am I missing?”

Frowning, Tom motioned at the members still dueling and shook his head.

“I know you have a date tonight. Be smart. I’ll talk to Everett, but I’m not certain the elves have forgiven you,” Tom replied before snorting. “Or perhaps the noble family whose son you killed is making a move, realizing the window of opportunity for revenge is closing quickly if you are in the tower. Either way, just be safe.”

Max nodded and found himself anxious at those two possibilities.

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A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

Ok - heads up here!

Perhaps you have heard of Mythos. This guy is a legend.

BOOK 8 hit Amazon! Honestly, I think he types faster than I do!

Check out the whole series if you want!

Max waited downstairs as he had been informed to, sitting in his suit that he had only worn a few times. A few of the other faction members had nodded and smiled, some wondering what he was doing dressed up as much as he was.

When Tanila came down the stairs, her hair braided with decorations in them again, a green dress that hugged her in all the right places and accented her curves, red lipstick that made her lips beg for attention, and a smile that set his heart beating faster, Max forgot for a moment the worries that had been gnawing at him.

Rising from his spot and almost rushing to the stairs, Max waited at the bottom, grinning like a fool at the woman his heart ached for every day.

“You look amazing,” he said, his eyes trying to take in all of her at once.

“I bet you say that to all the elf women you meet,” she replied with a wink.

Shrugging, Max pulled out the bouquet of flowers and held it out, seeing Tanila react to the orchids he had in his hand.

“How did you… Batrire,” she said with a slight chuckle. “That little devil.”

Nodding, Max helped her down the last few stairs and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You do look amazing. Ready to go?”

Tanila nodded and slid her arm into Max’s. “Forgive me if I fall asleep, though. That massage was relaxing. Batrire even got her beard steamed.”

Trying not to laugh, Max held back the chuckles, and Tanila’s face turned red for a moment when she realized how that sounded.

“Her facial beard!” she exclaimed.

“I figured, but still, either way, I’m sure Fowl will be excited.”

Rolling her eyes, they both smiled at the members who were downstairs and watching the two of them. All eyes were clearly on Tanila, not the lucky man walking with her.

“You’ve done exceptionally well tonight,” Tanila said as she patted her lips carefully with her napkin. “The food here is exceptional, and I haven’t seen this caliber of cooking in a long time.”

“I might have asked for a little help,” Max admitted. “All I’ve known are inns and taverns. Everett was kind enough to let me borrow his secretary for a few ideas.”

Smiling, she picked up the crystal glass, sipping the wine that was in it, enjoying the flavor and body of it. “I’ll need to tell her a thank you tomorrow.”

Glancing around the restaurant that they were in, Max couldn’t help but feel unprepared for this place. The silverware, utensils, and glasses were worth more than his entire family’s property he imagined. The food they ate and the wine they drank cost more than he would have ever earned in a lifetime. A group of musicians played on their stringed instruments, creating a gentle, peaceful, calming sound. The noise of others was minimal as the space between tables was almost two-thirds of his sonar range.

“Excuse me, sir.” Max turned to the waiter who stood there, the slightest smile on their lips as they held a bottle of wine in their hands for him to see. “A gift from the one who paid for the meal. He said to enjoy the night and cherish it always.”

“I would have turned it down, but it appears you have already opened it,” Max replied.

“Yes. It needed to breathe as all do. If I had known, I would have kept it sealed, and you two could have shared it at a later date.”

Unable to tell anything about the wine or its taste by looking at the bottle once more, Max nodded and motioned to his glass. The man poured it carefully, showing practice and precision.

He held the bottle out to Tanila, but she waved him away. “I am good right now. Still working on this glass. Besides, I’m not certain I would continue to act ladylike if I had another glass at the moment.”

The slightest chuckle came from the waiter, who nodded his head and set the bottle on the table. “Enjoy it. If needed, it can be stored in dimensional storage for you two and enjoyed at a later date. We offer that service free of charge.”

With that, the waiter turned and left them alone.

“I guess I’ll owe Everett a thank you as well,” Max said as he picked up the glass. “I didn’t expect him to pay for this. Now I feel like I’m being cheap on our date.”

Tanila shook her head and smiled. “I would never imagine you as the kind to be cheap. Flowers, chocolates, and perfume. That doesn’t sound like someone who wanted me to forget tonight anytime soon.”

Max smiled and lifted the cup to his nose, practicing what he had seen the other patrons do with their drinks. An earthy tone, a hint of some fruit, and a spice filled his nostrils, and he winked at Tanila before taking a sip.

It was dry, yet so many flavors came across his tongue. A hint of smoke was present, and as he swallowed the wine, his throat burned slightly.

[Poison Detected]

Max’s eyes flew open, and his throat roared with pain. In a moment, his stomach began to feel like someone was tearing it apart from the inside.

His lungs felt like they were starting to stop working, and his brain began to panic.

[Regeneration]

“Seth!”

Tanila’s shout filled his ears, and the sounds of tables and chairs scaping along the tiled floor came from everywhere. A glass broke on the floor, and some silverware made a very clear sound as they bounced on the tiles.

Footsteps and other noises were coming as people began to race toward him.

Glass was held to his lips, and Max tried to drink but couldn’t. His mind wasn’t working, and his body was in a state of convulsions.

His eyes were looking straight ahead, and Max saw Tanila staring at him, her mouth moving; no more noise was coming from her. He was being jostled, and someone was trying to move him, but Tanila wasn’t letting go. Tears were coming down her cheeks, and the perfect makeup she had put on was beginning to run down her cheeks.

This is not good. I’m not certain your Regeneration skill will be able to help here. The damage is magical and moving fast.

The voice rang out inside his mind over the quietness of the world around him. Max struggled to focus, knowing it was his skill.

Let go… let the wall down. I will deal with this.

As if the skill could sense Max’s will to fight it, even when death was close, there was a bit of frustration in the tone.

Now is not the time to worry. I do this for us. Give in. Let me do what I must to ensure our survival. If you do not, tonight will be the last time you see that woman again.

Max's heart stopped, not because of the fear of that but because of the poison. Panic and dread were replaced by one thing: being there for Tanila.

Ok…

Darkness overtook him.

It appears you may have been found. Someone is either very upset with you, or there is no doubt that those hunting us have tracked their quarry.

Swimming in space, Max saw what looked like a night filled with stars all around him. He was weightless, struggling to turn and move. Glancing over his shoulder were more stars that seemed to go on forever.

Where am I?

A place that is between life and death. I almost wasn't able to stop that poison. Had you not been as strong as you are, with the skills you have, and if I had not evolved, we would both be gone from this moment.

But who could have tracked me? How could they have found me?

A mirror image of himself appeared before him, only it didn't struggle to move. It floated there as if it were the most natural thing in the universe. Those dark eyes stared back at him, studying him intently.

There are powers far beyond what you can imagine, and you and I are a threat to many. Not just that, fool Phaius and any others who might believe they stand a chance to stop us. You met that dragon. He is more powerful than you can imagine, but he also knows that if nothing stops you and I, together, we could cut him down like a stalk of wheat during harvest. That is why he made that pact.

Max's mind felt foggy, but he could remember that moment with great effort.

So what do we do? How often will this happen?

His image stared at him but said nothing for a while. In silence, they stood there, floating in the midst of darkness.

What matters is who attacked us. If they are not of your world, it will have cost them much, and failing will have been for naught. They might not try again, or they might. No doubt their actions here will have caught the attention of the three gods of your world, and they will not be happy, no matter the reason given.

Won't they tell the gods who I am?

Laughter echoed in the void.

No. To do that would be foolish for any of them. No doubt your three gods will cause trouble in a world or two of the other, seeking to extract some form of vengeance. If it wasn't from outside your world, then they likewise played a very powerful card. The poison they used cannot be made easily and is worth a kingdom.

For them to have failed will not bode well for them. Those who hired them will want results, but both parties will find themself in a bad position.

Because it failed?

Exactly.

Max's clone turned and pointed off in the distance, and a star began to come closer, gaining size until Max realized they were above a world and not a star at all. Clouds hovered over water and land masses, and the size of it almost overwhelmed Max's mind to comprehend what he was seeing.

This is one of many worlds. You live on one such as this. Wars are fought for power every day, and many would balk at what was given to kill you. For them to fail, reporting that would be bad for the god they worship.

A hand appeared on his shoulder, and Max shivered, staring so closely into his own eyes.

We have a small window of time before they might make another move. They will fear us, and the next attack that comes will be even worse. You are lucky Tanila did not drink from that bottle. Had she… she would be dead.

Pain surged through his chest as Max considered the truth of that statement.

Go… you need to wake up. Get stronger. I will help and not ask for too much. Just know that a time will come. You will not like it, but when it does, I will need to do what must be done. The world will flow with blood in order for us to survive.

Max wanted to reply, but his body started to fall into the darkness. Pulling him downward.

He coughed, and his body ached. Pain wracked him as he blinked. A cold, wet cloth over his forehead and a death grip from someone held his hand.

"Seth!"

Tanila's voice was sweeter than he could remember. He heard the sound of chairs scraping against the floor and began to sense the number of people in the room.

His eyes finally worked, and he focused on Tanila, frowning. Her eyes were red and puffy. She looked tired. Massive bags were under her eyes, and her red hair was in a mess, even though it was still in braids.

"He's alive! Thank Ockrim, he's alive!"

Tanila nodded as Fowl and Batrire pressed against the edge of the bed.

“You all look terrible,” Max managed to say. His voice sounded raspy, and his throat was drier than he could remember. “A drink?”

A cup of water appeared, and he tried to sit up.

“Slow down,” Tanila said, holding the cup to his lips. “You don’t need to rush. We got time.”

Gulping down water and trying not to choke, Max felt the cool water begin to soothe his aching neck.

[Regeneration]

Each drink he took sent the liquid quickly to the edges of his body, making him feel alive and amazing, the pain and headache vanishing almost immediately.

“Another,” he said, this time his voice sounding strong and determined. “Give me the pitcher.”

Fowl handed it to him, and Max took it into his own hands, gulping down the water and ignoring the protests Tanila was trying to raise.

With the entire clay pot empty, Max handed it back to Fowl and pushed himself up.

“Seth, slow down!” Tanila pleaded. “You need to rest!”

Cupping her cheek in his hand, Max frowned and shook his head. “No. I need to get stronger. They're going to come again, and I need to be ready.”

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

Wondering what's going on further in the story?

My Patreon dropped chapter 197 today!

Read ahead and see what Max is doing to get stronger!

ALSO - Book 5 is finished (got to do edits now! ((book 4 is in final edits w/ publisher)).

Started book 6 and my beta readers are dying (in a good way). Nothing like those rare few who have helped make sure you keep the story going the way it should beg you to write faster because the cliff was too great...

Can't wait for you all to read book 5!

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A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

One of my fellow authors with Podium, Tobias Begley, just launched their book Mana Mirror.

Check it out on Amazon and see if you like it!

Amazon Link: https://www.royalroad.com/amazon/B0CYHQG7L4
Audiobook Link: https://www.audible.com/pd/Mana-Mirror-The-First-Gate-Audiobook/B0D5SB2784

“Take a break!” Tom shouted.

Max pulled back from the match he was having with the Faction member named Grace. The woman gave him a nod before moving to the bench she sat on each time they rested.

“I’m fine,” Max protested as he moved to where Tom was waiting. “I feel amazing.”

“Which is impossible, but I won’t argue about this again,” the older man stated, glaring at Max. “You should be dead, and you aren’t. The guards have come by three times expecting me to verify you are deceased, and I have yet to give it to them. The truth is you’re going to get a lot more attention than you want.”

Tom started to stare off at the sky as he continued talking. “I should have guessed someone would make a move after what you told me, but not like that. Only Everett, myself, and our healer know the extent of what you were poisoned with. Why someone would use that on you…”

Trailing off, Tom turned his attention back to Max, waiting to see if the bald-headed warrior would finally shed some light on the situation. When no answer came, Tom grunted and pointed at the water on the bench. “Drink it, and you can go again in a minute.”

“Why are we doing this?” Max asked as he grabbed the pitcher of water. “You and I both know I am fine. Are you really just trying to get a better read on my abilities?”

“I am, and you know it,” Tom replied, not hiding his reason for this exercise. “You’re still holding back, and I can tell. The power and ability you demonstrate is beyond what should be possible, but I know you’ve been keeping things a secret from Everett and me.”

Frowning, Tom pointed at the gate to the property, where a few extra guards stood watch. “We protect our own, but I can’t protect you if I don’t know who or what I’m protecting. Your whole team is impossible, and even Cordellia isn’t doing what we asked.”

Max almost choked on the water he was drinking, hearing Tom admit that they wanted her spying on them.

“We thought Cordellia was loyal to the Faction and us, but somehow, she is more loyal to you.”

Tom ground his teeth after saying those words.

“Is that a problem?” Max asked, wiping his mouth and setting the jug of water down.

Taking a deep breath, letting it out, and repeating it once more, Tom finally shook his head slowly. “No… it isn’t because we trust her. If Cordellia is that committed to you, then we are committed just as much. She did mention, however, that you figured out the best path for getting stronger in the tower.” It almost appeared Tom forced himself to grin, but when it had finally appeared, he snorted. “You’re smart, strong, dedicated, loyal, and more dangerous than anything Everett and I have seen in a long time. Combined with the other four in your group, I will admit, for the first time, that you actually have a chance to make it further than most can imagine.”

Tom turned and poked Max in the chest. “I’m not saying you can beat the tower, but I will say you’re dumb enough to try.”

Chuckling, Max nodded and pointed at Grace. “Do you trust Grace? With secrets?”

Frowning, Tom raised an eyebrow as he studied Max. “I do… why?”

“I’ll give you one brief moment to see. Grace is currently adventuring somewhere withing the twentieth floor, if I’m right. She’s at least level sixty, and based on how she holds herself back, I’m willing to bet you expect me to beat her if I go all out.”

Tom didn’t say anything as Max moved to the sparing field.

Only the three of them were out there. Everyone else was inside or in the tower.

Nodding at Grace, the woman approached Max, taking out her shield and sword while he stood there with nothing but his armor.

“You seem very cocky to not take out anything this time,” Grace said, a slight grin visible between her plate helmet. “You certain you want to do it this way?”

Setting his feet and getting balanced, Max nodded.

Extending his left hand, he motioned for her to come, smiling the moment she sprang toward him.

She cut at him, her sword immediately going for a crippling strike, being smart enough to know that a different one was what Max had expected.

He stepped into her, his left arm catching her wrist. She tried to bring her shield toward him, but Max had already gotten too close. The speed at which he was moving was more than she had anticipated, and she hadn’t gone all out. Even now, trying to adjust and adapt, he had her wrist and wasn’t letting go. Like a vise, it didn’t matter if she tugged or pulled. Max’s grip wasn’t going to be broken.

His right hand grabbed her breastplate, right between the joints at the base, and in a single motion, she was airborne, feet no longer on the ground, and all the momentum from her strike added to what he was doing.

Like a person driving an axe into a log, trying to split it, Max drove her toward the ground, every ounce of power as her body hurtled downward, slamming into the hard-packed dirt.

Grace bounced a few feet off the ground from the impact, air leaving her lungs.

She couldn’t follow Max’s movements, the dazed moment of what was taking place making her oblivious to the knife now held to her throat as she came back to the ground.

“Stop!”

Tom’s voice rang out over the two of them, and Max immediately backed up, letting go of her arm and storing the blade.

Blinking her eyes, Grace saw Max holding a hand out to her, smiling.

“What the hell was that?” Grace asked after a few breaths, taking the offered help up.

“Just something I saw Dexic do during a training session.”

Shaking her head, Grace bowed her head at Max and then nodded at Tom, who was moving toward the two of them.

“Did you try?”

Grace started to laugh and then coughed, her lungs needing a little more time to prepare for such a thing. “Did I try? Are you serious, Tom? This kid just made me look like a fool, and you want to insult me like that?”

Though Grace’s black skin didn’t show redness like most would when upset, the tone and expression she wore as she glared at Tom, snarling almost was all that the older man needed to realize the mistake he had made.

“Forgive me,” he replied, holding up his hands. “I… I was just as surprised as you were and might have spoken poorly. I have no doubt you didn’t hold back.”

Huffing loudly, Grace’s dueling equipment was gone, replaced with some normal clothes, and she headed toward the Faction house.

“I’ll be inside. I may need a few hours to get over my anger,” she said, glaring at Tom over her shoulder.

Neither said anything as the warrior walked away, waiting till she was inside before speaking again.

“Will that suffice?” Max asked. The frown he gave told Tom about the thin ice he was on with two people at the moment.

Sighing, Tom nodded. “Forgive me… I just needed to know.”

Max nodded and immediately swapped into his normal clothes. “I’ll be inside, preparing for tomorrow.”

Tom watched Max walk away, upset with himself at how that had gone. “You’re getting old,” Tom told himself out loud. “One of these days, those young ones are going to kick your arse.”

“Holy goblin balls,” Cordellia said as they entered the third floor. “This isn’t the kind of zone I wanted to come back to.”

Max and the rest nodded, taking in the city they could see slightly below them. They appeared on a small elevated spot that led into a broken city below. Stone buildings, roads, and walls all reflected a major city that had come to ruin for hundreds of

years. High above the city in the sky was a full moon that shone brightly down upon the city, casting shadows all over it.

“Any ideas what could be–”

A howl came from within the walls, cutting off Fowl’s question.

“That sounds bad,” Fowl immediately said. “Wolves are never fun.”

Max nodded, swapping out his gear and nodding at Batrire, who cast her buff on the group.

“We’ll go slow, learn what we’re facing, and make a plan from there.”

Everyone grunted in response to Max’s statement, and the group slowly began to move toward the town, unsure what they would find.

“Four werewolves,” Max whispered as he pointed at the pack. “Three black ones and a white one. Do you have any ideas?”

Cordellia shook her head, and Max knew the notes he had read didn’t contain any real information about them either.

“Ok, same plan as always. Root two, focus one, Fowl tanks the other. Any questions?”

With everyone ready, Fowl tossed his rock, earning a howl from the pack of werewolves that immediately bounded toward them.

Tanila rooted one of the black ones and then immediately encased the white one in ice.

Max held his halberd ready, waiting for one to get closer as the first ran on all fours and slammed into Fowl. His dwarven friend moved back a few feet from the impact, but the werewolf yelped in pain from the aura that had damaged it.

Max waited for the werewolf to come toward him, feet set. When it lunged, he swung with his weapon, surprised when the blade cut through the werewolf with ease. His weapon had cut from the collarbone down to its hip, slamming the creature into the ground as Max finished his downward swing.

Cordellia and Tanila were killing the rooted werewolf, and with one last attack, Max felt a cold chill rush through him, letting him know the monster was dead.

[1 Strength Consumed]

[1 Constitution Consumed]

Immediately moving to where Fowl was, Max took off the werewolf’s head, noticing that Fowl’s new weapon was causing a good chunk of damage compared to before.

No chill came, and Max fought back the sigh he felt.

The third werewolf was down, burnt to a crisp, and riddled with a few arrows.

“Fowl hit that white one. Let’s see what’s different.”

“Always the test subject,” Fowl grunted as the two of them moved to where the white one stood encased in ice.

Fowl hammered at the werewolf, getting about four attacks in before the ice broke completely.

Once freed, the white creature began attacking the Fowl with a speed far greater than the black ones, which Max could tell were at least a foot taller and more muscular than this one.

Suddenly, its hand glowed blue, and it struck at Fowl, getting past his defenses and slicing along his weapon arm.

Fowl groaned, and almost five percent of health vanished from the dwarf’s health bar.

Max didn’t wait. He engaged the wolf and swung, surprised when it dodged his attack from the side.

“This thing is fast!”

“No goblin shite!” Fowl yelled back.

[Blind]

Max hadn’t tested the skill in a while and knew that even with it being low ranked, the odds of it working weren’t perfect, yet there wasn’t a better time to see.

The werewolf swung its claws wildly as Max's spell took hold. Max moved forward, cleaving the creature almost in half. The cold sensation he longed for filled him.

[6 Dexterity Consumed]

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Would you like to learn [Magical Strike]?]

[Yes / No]

Grinning, Max pulled his weapon free from the remains and saw Fowl frowning at him.

“I don’t want to know…” the dwarf muttered, pointing at Cordellia behind them. “Just tell me later.”

Nodding, Max clicked yes and felt his mouth go wide as magic seemed to flow through his whole body.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

I am out of pocket this week (sorry summer is like my busy time)!

Don't worry! Book 4 is fully scheduled out and I have book 5 in first round of edits before it hits RR.

Monday, July the 1st is a big day!

Enjoy your week!

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[Skill Description - Magical Strike]

*****

Magical Strike—Rare Skill: The user's next melee attack ignores all armor, dealing damage based on the user's intelligence. This ability has a one-hour cooldown.

*****

Max couldn’t help but whistle softly, earning him another grunt from Fowl, who pointed at the corpses.

“What do we harvest from these?” Fowl called out as he faced Cordellia.

“Try the paws and testicles. I’m not certain about anything else.”

Fowl’s curses echoed through the tower floor as everyone laughed, each one remembering his promise to harvest all testicles forever.

Tanila came up to Max, who was standing near his dwarf friend, bent over with a knife in his hand, and grabbed the corpse by the balls.

“You ok?”

Max nodded. “Give me just a moment.”

He deactivated Batrire’s buff before checking something.

[Status Check]

*****

Max Hoste

18-Year-old Human Male

Level 1

Exp 21/1000

Tower Experience: 2.1%

HP: 1970/1970

MP: 1330/1330

Stamina: 985/985

STR: 133+72

DEX: 121+59

CON: 133+64

INT: 101+32

WIS: 101+32

Defense of the Dragon - 1.5%

Defense of the Demon - 1.5%

Demon Essence: - 340

*****

Pulling out a journal, Max wrote a few things and then pointed at the line he had written.

“Currently, one thirty-three is the top stat so far from these first ones. I’m not certain what all the potential is, but I’m just gathering information.”

She chuckled and nodded as he put the book away.

“Get the skill?” she asked quietly.

“I did. I’ll tell you later, but I’m interested in seeing what it does.”

With a pouch of werewolf testicles started, Max and the rest began moving through the town slowly.

“Berserked!” Fowl shouted.

The black werewolf that had been hitting him had glowed red, its eyes becoming the color of rubies. The strikes it delivered with its claws were knocking Fowl backward.

“Blinded!” Tanila shouted out.

Fowl continued to back up and away from the creature, thankful when Max came up from behind and removed its head.

[Consume has Consumed a Higher Rank Skill]

[Berserker - Uncommon has been upgraded to Berserker - Rare]

Max frowned, having thought the rank might be higher than this but still interested in seeing how it played out.

Two more white wolves fell to his weapon.

[6 Dexterity Consumed]

[6 Dexterity Consumed]

“What in the gods was that?” Fowl muttered as he kicked the headless black werewolf in the side. “Berserker? In here?”

“It looks like we’ll have to be on our guard,” Max replied. “Nice work on the blind!”

Tanila nodded, and they moved along. Cordellia helped Fowl with his work, unable to watch the dwarf suffer in silence.

“How long will he have to do this?” their archer asked. “I mean, did he lose a bet?

“Something like that,” Batrire replied with a grin. “Eventually, we’ll help him, but it’s the first time in a while since we’ve harvested these things.”

Max began pulling packs to them, finding hidden groups inside buildings, and making sure to limit the number of werewolves to seven. He and Tanila could easily keep that many disabled while they worked their way through them, but after seeing two abilities and knowing the danger of Berserker possibly being owned by these monsters, safety was the best option.

Hours passed as they cut their way through the city, trying to find the right path. A lone tower stood in the middle, and Max used it as a reference point, climbing on the roofs occasionally to make sure he could find a good path toward it.

Finally, they reached the center of the town, seeing packs of werewolves wandering around a massive circular courtyard. About four hundred yards of paved stones with roots growing between them and the occasional broken stone made up the area, where in the middle, a twenty-foot-tall stone fence with a wooden door encircled the tower they had seen.

“That looks kinda bad,” Cordellia pointed out. “Are we planning on checking it out?”

“What if the exits inside?” Max asked. “Is that possible?”

“Sometimes. No one knows how each floor works. There are a few where it's endless monsters until you either cut your way to the portal or leave.”

“An endless horde of monsters?” Fowl asked, groaning at the thought. Can you imagine Wonderboy here?”

A few chuckles came, and Max shook his head, ignoring them.

“I think I can pull this whole courtyard, and we can kill them all in one go.”

Both dwarves coughed, and even Tanila gasped at Max's statement. The only one who didn’t seem surprised at first was their archer, who hadn’t expected less.

“There has to be over a hundred in this place. That seems totally stupid and crazy.”

Max laughed and shrugged. “Seriously. I can outrun them easily, and I’ll kill as many as I can. You just be ready to taunt, and Tanila and the Cordella can kill any that come after you.”

“I guess,” Fowl replied, clearing his throat and rotating his shoulders. Just try not to overdo it.”

Max nodded, turned to the group, and gave a thumbs-up.

He took off running, weapon and shield out, collecting group after group with ease. The larger the group grew, the faster the others in the massive center of town joined in. His Fire and Frost Novas kept the horde controlled and contained, and by the time Max returned toward Tanila and the others, a fair number of werewolves had died.

“Be ready!” Max shouted as he came right at Fowl, who had moved a bit away from the group.

He could see a look of terror in Fowl’s eyes and, for a moment, wondered if perhaps he was asking too much.

“Actually, wait! I’ll run around again!”

Making another loop around the courtyard, Max had taken the number of werewolves down to about sixty.

“You can see some of them are berserked!” Fowl shouted as he pointed at the pack.

Tanila and the other two nodded even though their warrior wasn’t looking at them.

“Another lap!” Fowl shouted. “You got berserk ones!”

Max didn’t hesitate, turning again and killing the group slowly. Finally, only about twenty remained when he came to Fowl, most of them struggling to move from how badly burnt each monster’s body was.

Tanila cast a fireball, and when it landed in the middle of the pack, pieces of burnt werewolf corpses exploded everywhere, showering the stones with gore.

“It seems a bit boring if you ask me,” Cordelllia said. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, that was some serious experience, and the whole courtyard is covered with gems, but how in the gods do we plan on being sane if every level is like this?”

“Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth,” Batrire answered, giving their archer a gentle squeeze on her arm. “If there is one thing I’ve learned in all our time with Seth, something always goes tits up eventually.”

Tanila started laughing as she walked toward the pile of gems, knowing Batrire was right. Something always went tits up eventually.

It felt like forever as they picked up all the gems, but standing before the door, the group all seemed to frown.

“Guess we really have to open this. Seems wrong not to.”

Max nodded and pointed at the massive metal ring nine feet off the ground. “I can use my halberd and pull it open. I’ll be able to push it the rest of the way I get it moved past the ledge.

Fowl nodded and stood back a little bit, shield and weapon ready, as the others moved a few yards behind him.

Hooking his bade around the metal ring, Max began to pull, feeling the door fight to open for a second. Putting a little more effort into it, he leaned back, hands on the end of the weapon shaft.

The moment he managed to make it move, the door swung open, knocking Max and his weapon backward and tumbling across the stone courtyard.

An eighteen-foot-tall werewolf with pitch-black fur and a single teardrop of white on its chest burst through the door and engaged Fowl in a heartbeat.

Its massive clawed hand smacked into the dwarf, hitting Fowl’s shield and roaring from the pain of the thorns. Fowl glowed green a second before the strike came.

Max was still reeling from the hit, tumbling as his friend took hit after hit, his hit points draining away even with the added defenses.

By the time Max was on his feet, Fowl had already lost a third of his health. He held two shields in a defensive position as the giant werewolf continued to beat on him.

Batrire, Tanila, and Cordellia all backed up, trying to get some distance, not wanting to be so close to the monster.

Casting her heal over time and her minor heal, Batrire watched as the health bar went up slightly only to be knocked back down.

Max was on his feet, looking for his weapon, and finally spotted it far enough away it was going to take him more time than he felt he had.

Fowl never flinched. His eyes tracked the werewolf's swings and the clawed foot that came. He adjusted his position and step, doing his best to create glancing blows now that the surprise of the first attack was over.

Red blood stained the stones from where the boss was injuring itself against the aura, each hit making it dislike Fowl more and more.

Batrire had him back over three-fourths of his health when his root ability wore off. The next few strikes caused considerably more damage.

“Blind it!”

Tanila didn’t hesitate, and immediately, the boss's red eyes were clouded in a dark haze.

Fowl backed up, moving from the wild punches and kicks that came where it anticipated him being.

With his weapon back in hand, Max raced toward the creature.

Suddenly, the boss laid its head back and howled.

Fowl froze where he was, and even Cordellia appeared unable to react.

An aura of intimidation washed over Max, but he shrugged it off. His mental stats were far too high to succumb to its attack.

More howls came from around the city, and Max wanted to curse.

“We need to get inside that wall!” Max shouted, yet no one was able to. The effects of the boss’s ability had frozen two members, limiting their chance of making it past the boss.

Storing his weapons, Max raced toward the three in the back. “Forgive me!” he shouted as he grabbed them one at a time, tossing them onto his shoulder before turning toward Fowl.

The boss’s eyes were beginning to glow, and Max could tell Tanila’s spell was about to wear off.

It was a race to Fowl as the giant werewolf started to move, closing the single step between Fowl and itself.

[Intimidation]

Max’s ability went out from him, and the boss stumbled for a moment. The creature’s stats were strong enough that it did not completely succumb to it but still low enough that Max was able to get to his friend and grab him before the creature attacked again.

With four people all bouncing upon his shoulders, Max did the only thing he could think of.

[Demonic Portal]

They instantly appeared behind the werewolf, inside the stone walls, and near the doorway that led to the tower.

Max kicked the door as he sat his friends down, frustrated that the thing wouldn’t budge.

“Seth!” Tanila shouted.

He knew what was coming. Without needing vision or his sonar, the kick he had delivered to the door told the boss exactly where they were.

Pulling his weapon and shield from storage, Max spun, racing head-on at the boss.

[Blind]

Its eyes only turned black for a second, just enough to make it slam its head into the stone part of the wall where the door was cut out of.

The force of it shook the stones, but they held, and Max prepared for what was about to come.

Yips and shouts echoed across the city, and without a way to get the door his friends were next to open, they were trapped.

[Demonic Summoning]

[Summoning Failed - Blood Component Required]

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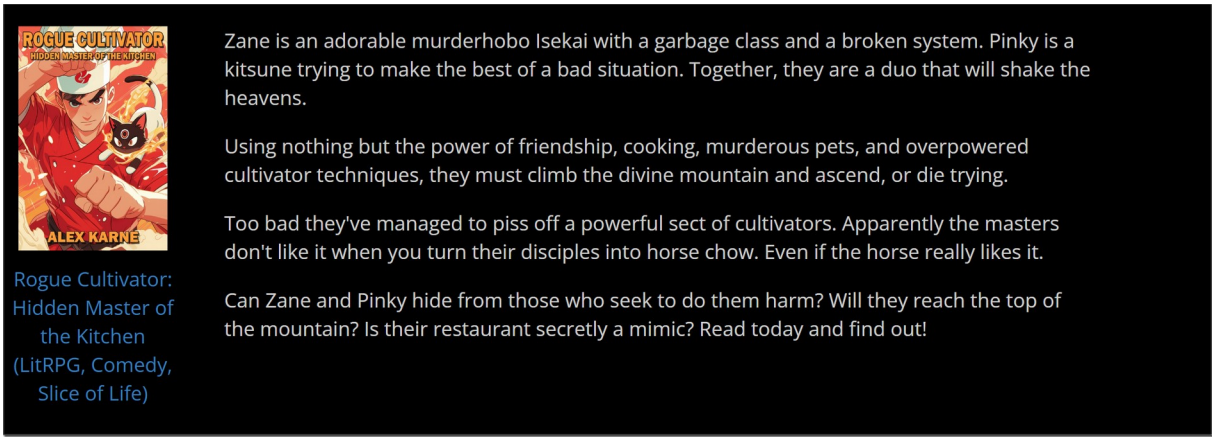
A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


ROGUE CULTIVATOR
HIDDEN MASTER OF THE KITCHEN
ALEX KARNE
Rogue Cultivator: Hidden Master of the Kitchen (LitRPG, Comedy, Slice of Life)
Zane is an adorable murderhobo Isekai with a garbage class and a broken system. Pinky is a kitsune trying to make the best of a bad situation. Together, they are a duo that will shake the heavens.
Using nothing but the power of friendship, cooking, murderous pets, and overpowered cultivator techniques, they must climb the divine mountain and ascend, or die trying.
Too bad they've managed to piss off a powerful sect of cultivators. Apparently the masters don't like it when you turn their disciples into horse chow. Even if the horse really likes it.
Can Zane and Pinky hide from those who seek to do them harm? Will they reach the top of the mountain? Is their restaurant secretly a mimic? Read today and find out!

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/89084/rogue-cultivator-hidden-master-of-the-kitchen

Max cursed, removing his bracers for a moment with a thought of his mind, his halberd replaced with his new dagger and cut the top of his forearm.

In less than a second he was bleeding, and his armor was back on, halberd in hand.

[Demonic Summoning]

The world shifted, and every color changed. The boss froze, and so did Max, as the world looked like something through a kaleidoscope he had played with as a kid. Part of him wanted to tumble and fall, and the other part felt a strong urge to vomit.

Blood flowed from his arm like a geyser, spraying into a pattern in the air.

Max wasn’t certain he had that much blood, and when he tried to activate Regeneration, nothing happened.

The shape of the pattern began to mesh with red and black orbs of light that fled from his body, turning the blood color into an image of flames.

Before him, a portal began to open. Large clawed hands reached to where the portal was and began to force it open wider. Black skin with long claws, covered in red and

fiery veins, came forth from it. The portal soon almost took up the entire space that the massive wooden door had, easily fifteen feet tall as a giant body of twisted flesh and power stepped through the portal and onto the stones before Max.

“You dare summon me?!”

Its clawed hands came at Max with a speed he could see but was unable to dodge. He was frozen, unable to move.

As the claws approached within inches of his body, an explosion of power blew the demon’s clawed hand back, and it howled in pain. Holding its hand with the other, it shook in fury and then breathed a cone of flames from its mouth.

Max watched as the flames parted right before him, not even the heat of the fire touching him.

“HOW?! How can you control me?! I am not one to be trifled with mortal!”

Its voice felt like nails on a chalkboard, yet Max couldn’t help but smile at this moment. The world around him wasn’t moving at all; he was somewhere else.

“You are bound to me for two hours,” Max replied. “As is the bargain.”

“What do you know about the bargain?!” it hissed, stomping around the area, glancing at the world around them. “Why? Why have you summoned me?”

Max knew a little bit from the description of the spell he had used and had never intended to cast it, but with time running out and his party trapped, he couldn’t wait. There were no other options.

“You will fight for me. Defeat my enemies on this tower floor and you shall be free to go granted you do not harm me or my allies.”

A slight change in the demon’s red eyes took place when Max mentioned the tower. It spun around, studying the area it was in. It could see the giant werewolf and Max’s friends.

“You would allow me to leave early? Why?”

Max had no idea how to deal with a demon. He knew they were evil, sought power, and hated most races.

“I may require your services again down the road. I won’t call often, but when I do, it will only be for a specific thing. Unlike those like me who might enslave you and your kind, my needs are simple: Defeat my enemy before you. Protect my allies and myself. After that, you may return home, provided you do not attempt to harm me or my allies.”

The demon began to laugh, cackling in a way that almost made Max feel like he needed a bath. It studied him and shook its head.

“You think you could stop me from killing you and your friends?”

Something inside Max changed, and he realized it wasn’t him but the skill that was there. A sensation he couldn’t begin to understand offered itself at this moment. Slowly, Max opened himself up and felt it begin to trickle like a tiny spring. Each

second added power and a sensation of something greater than himself or that demon.

It too noticed as it began to move back a step, banging into whatever wall of multicolored glass was behind it.

“Who are you?! What are you?!” it demanded, actively trying to move further away from Max.

From inside, the voice came, and Max recognized it as his skill.

“A bargain has been made. Accept it or forfeit your soul and all those you have collected. Many more souls may be gained in the coming moments and an army of those lesser than you is headed here. Choose now. Be the servant or die at my hand.”

Max watched as his right hand rose, his fingers prepared to snap.

The demon’s eyes began to shake in their black, scaled sockets.

“I accept!” it howled immediately. “The bargain made, I shall accept!”

Max nodded, and his hand lowered back down to his side.

“Prepare yourself. This realm is ending.”

Whatever had bubbled up inside began to disappear, and Max felt himself returning to normal, amazed at what had just happened.

The demon turned, studying the glass or crystal walls that began to shatter and appeared to be breaking. It faced the werewolf and began casting a spell. Two black swords began to come from a portal and it grabbed each of them, arming itself.

A shattering sound filled Max’s ears, and the howl from the boss turned into a grunt as two black swords plunged at it.

Somehow, it backed up enough to only be cut by them, a hissing sound coming from where the blades had burned it.

Max stood there, dumbfounded, as he watched the demon begin to assault the massive werewolf.

Pieces of flesh from both began to fly as each one landed hits. The claws of the werewolf tore off a massive chunk of flesh from the demon’s chest as a strip of flesh was cut from one of its legs.

“Help it!” Tanila shouted.

Racing forward, Max dodged around both of the creatures and their bodies, the two of them almost brawling from how close they were. The demon needed more room, but the werewolf didn’t give any to it.

A glow covered the boss, and Max watched as its claws moved at a speed and combination that meant one thing.

Rampage.

The demon howled, backing up and slamming into the open door, struggling to stand from the massive gouges in its body.

A pillar of stone appeared behind the werewolf, and Max raced for it, jumping onto it and planting his feet.

[Power Strike]

His blade cut a gash the entire length of the werewolf's back, slicing through is spinal cord a few feet above its hips.

Both legs gave out immediately, and as it fell, the demon reacted in a moment.

The blades came together, catching the werewolf’s neck, acting like a pair of scissors and taking it clean off.

An icy and hot sensation flooded Max, and he stumbled, falling off the stone ramp.

[6 Strength Consumed]

[6 Dexterity Consumed]

[6 Constitution Consumed]

[6 Intelligence Consumed]

[6 Wisdom Consumed]

[1 Greater Soul Consumed]

[1 Greater Soul Given Away]

His body felt on fire, and he could see the demon staring at him in fear.

“You… you are that one.”

Max nodded and stood up, frustrated at not getting a skill, but then again, he wasn’t sure why he had gotten those stats or soul. He hadn’t killed the boss. The demon had.

Howls came from around them, and Max and the demon turned to see a horde of werewolves approaching.

“I will shut the door and handle this. I owe you for saving me.”

A sense of frustration seemed to emanate from the demon.

Max nodded and ran back inside the walls, watching the door swing shut and listening to it slam.

All around them, the sound of werewolves filled the city, and then the sounds of carnage could be heard.

Yelps and cries of pain and agony moved around them as Max knew the demon must be making its way through the horde.

Tanila stared at Max in shock. Batrire, too, focused on Fowl and Cordellia, who were both no longer succumbing to the intimidation.

“The experience… it’s still going up.”

Max felt his eyes widen at that knowledge, realizing that there was a constant string of notifications being sent to him for a moment till it suddenly stopped

[1 Soul Consumed]

[1 Soul Given Away]

[1 Soul Consumed]

[1 Soul Given Away]

[1 Soul Consumed]

[1 Soul Given Away]

[1 Soul Consumed]

[1 Soul Given Away]

[1 Soul Consumed]

[1 Soul Given Away]

[1 Soul Consumed]

[1 Soul Given Away]

I have stopped that. It was annoying me.

What did I do?

Max waited, wondering what his skill might say, wondering what was happening.

You summoned a demon. It is bound to you for good or bad. Had it died, you would have suffered. You saved it. An act no one else would have, and the demon knows it. That part of you that is connected. As such, it is an ability in some ways. I’m not certain what will happen the next time you summon a demon. If the same one returns, perhaps then we may find out more.

That makes no sense! I didn’t want to bind to a demon! I just…

Max stopped himself, knowing that he had acted in desperation. There was most likely no way they would have defeated that boss and survived the horde outside these walls.

“Tell me when it stops,” Max said silently.

Tanila nodded, watching his face and the scowl he now wore.

After an hour of fighting, Max heard the door begin to open. He had made certain everyone was off to the side, unable to see what was beyond it, hoping Cordellia and Fowl wouldn't know what had happened just yet.

Walking through the small opening, Max saw the demon covered in blood, its body glistening in the moonlight. All around him were the twinkling of yellow gems.

"You are free to return to your realm," Max said, giving a nod.

The demon started to laugh, both of its swords vanishing into a portal that appeared on each side.

"I will go, but do not hesitate to call me again. Today's battle was far greater for me than I think you realize. My rank shall rise because of this, and some will wonder how, but I will protect your secret since you saved me."

Max nodded slowly, trying to get a read on the demon who lived for the power and blood of its enemies and yet somehow understood the potential their relationship might provide.

"I don't know when it will happen again, but thank you for keeping your word."

The demon waved its hand in a pattern, and a portal opened up behind it.

"Until we meet again, destroyer of worlds."

Max wanted to shout after it, but it was gone. Its last words to him almost sent him into a frenzy.

I'm not a destroyer of worlds? Am I?

No answer came, and Max took a deep breath. He looked around the courtyard, and his eyes stopped, freezing on something he hadn't expected.

Spinning in the middle of the air, a few feet from the ground, was a small key.

It wasn't huge like the normal chest keys that came from a chest boss. This one was like any normal key he had used in his life. Small enough to fit in his hand and looked to be made of nothing special.

His mind immediately told him what it was for.

Moving to it, Max quickly put it in his storage and then grabbed the door. Pulling it open, he saw the rest of his party anxiously awaiting his return.

"I'm sorry, but collecting all of these gems will take us a while."

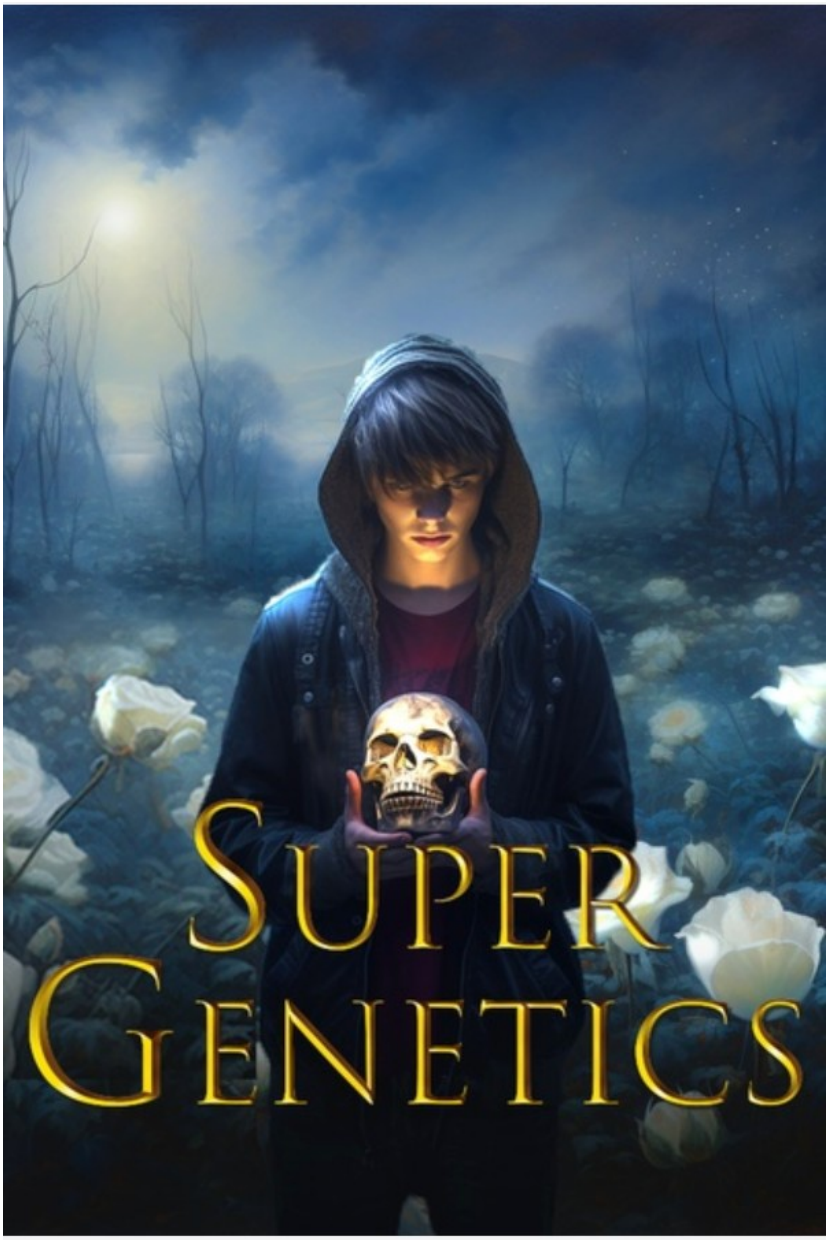
The four of them moved to where Max stood, and their eyes struggled to take in the number of glowing gems littering the entire stone courtyard.

"Holy elf tits," Cordellia said quietly.

"My thoughts exactly," Fowl replied.

181 - The Tower Within the Tower[181 - The Tower Within the Tower - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES



Super Genetics

by White Rose

They say there is no good or evil in post-Splintering America, just power.

Terry’s purpose is to prove them wrong.

They say there is no hope in Wichita.

The Emperor rules with an iron fist, his undead legions vast, the night eternal.

But Terry will serve as that beacon of hope to the powerless. He will bring light to his home.

And no one will stand in his way. Not even his S-ranked grandfather, the Emperor Himself.

This story is inspired by all the titans of the superhero genre—Worm, Super Supportive, the Boys, and so many more. It trends dark, but I meant it when I said Terry will be that beacon of hope. In a morally grey world ruled by superpowered autocrats, a little bit of good can shine bright.

The progression is slow-burn to start, but once it gets going, it really gets going.

This is a system-superhero story, so there will be skills, ranks, and so on once Terry unlocks his superpowers.

“Remind me again what happened?” Cordellia asked again. “Seth killed all of these?”

Tanila nodded and shrugged. “You and Fowl could not react after that massive werewolf used its intimidation ability. Thankfully, he had one special spell to help against all of these.”

The archer nodded, remembering some of it but not enough.

Max and Fowl were standing outside the tower's door, and both of them were still debating the choice before them.

“Tanila’s right, the portal out of here has to be somewhere else,” Fowl said again. “No tower floor would be locked behind a door like this.”

“Which begs the question again, what can be behind the door?”

Fowl shrugged. “Another portal? A chest? A tiny boss?” Fowl replied. “There are no windows on this thing and no other way in besides this door. It’s average height and even you kicking it did nothing. Are you that concerned about using the key?”

Sighing, Max motioned slowly at Cordellia, who was standing with the three women slightly away. “Do you trust her? I mean, if we keep going like this, is her bond to Tanila strong enough to keep her quiet?”

Fowl’s hammer appeared in his hand, and the dwarf smiled. “Stuff like this will also help keep her quiet. No adventurer is willing to tell on the golden goose. You’re a walking fountain of experience and rewards. She’s mentioned that in a few subtle ways. The tower experience she has gained, along with the normal kind, far outpacing what she had since she first started.”

The dwarf put away his weapon and tapped his head. “I’m not the smartest one here, but if I was new to all this, I’d gladly sew my lips shut to keep getting this kind of treatment. Seriously, Seth, we’re all almost level fifty-two.”

Retrieving the plain-looking key, Max nodded and spun it on his finger several times.

“I guess that means we’re going to see what’s inside.”

The five stood a few feet from the door, everyone outfitted for battle.

“Ready?” Max asked as he glanced at the two on either side of him.

Each one nodded, and he stepped forward, putting the key into the lock. Turning it with almost no resistance, a loud click came, and the door swung open, revealing a brightly lit room beyond the doorway.

“That room looks bigger on the inside than it does out here,” Fowl stated.

Max nodded and studied the room, which was lined with countless chests, cabinets, dressers, and other items, each stacked on top of the other.

“Warriors first,” Tanila said, earning a chuckle from Max, who held his weapon ready and moved through the doorway.

A flash of light appeared, and his eyes adjusted momentarily while his sonar never stopped working. He was in the room, and off to the side along the massive circular wall decorated with storage items was a creature he had never seen before.

Dressed in a bright orange robe was a three-fingered creature with scales that looked like a cross between a lizardman and something else.

“Guests,” it said, turning quickly. Its gold eyes tracked Max. A long, thin, forked tongue darted from its elongated snout and flicked around in the air. “Welcome! It has been ages since anyone has joined me!”

The sound of gasps echoed around the room, and felt Fowl bump into him.

“Holy elf tits,” Fowl muttered quietly in shock.

“Holy elf tits?” the orange-clad robe-wearing creature asked. “Are those a particular type? On a healer or priest by chance?”

Max and Fowl started to chuckle.

“What in the gods is this?” Batrire asked, ignoring the previous question.

“Ahh, yes!” exclaimed their host.“

The creature came toward them slowly. It had moved its hands or claws or whatever they were behind its back, slowly sashaying across the stone floor. Its orange robe was almost difficult to focus on, seeming to glow strangely. The green scales of the creature's face reflected some of the colors, creating an almost rainbow-like shimmer.

“So many questions. None wrong,” the creature replied, a slight hiss as it spoke. “Come, join me here, and let us discuss your reward. And please put away your weapons. You are all safe.”

The creature motioned to the center of the room. A bright yellow stone now sat in the middle, and a tiny black box rested on top.

“As to your questions, my name is Zisathass, and this is a rare area within the tower. It appears that your party is touched by the gods, gifted with a moment most will never get. Most climbers never see this room, and very few make it inside. Tell me how you came by the key.”

Everyone’s mind was trying to absorb what the creature, Zisathass, was saying.

“Wait,” Max said, still following Zisathass’s movements with his weapon. “So this is part of the tower? A reward of some kind?”

Zisathass reached the yellow stone and placed a hand on it. He nodded, a frown displayed across his scaled lips as he watched Max pointing a weapon at him.

“Please, put away your weapon. There is no way to hurt me here, and it is rude to continue to act as you are,” Zisathass said, a gruff tone present as he spoke. “Come to the box, claim your reward, and return to the tower. What is inside is something to help in your journey.”

After a quick glance around the others, Max stood up slowly, storing his weapon and shield, the others mimicking his actions. The creature nodded, and its lips changed. The smile it gave almost made Max want to bring his weapon out again.

“Forgive me, humans, dwarves, and elves. My kind does not show expressions you are used to. I can see you do not like how I look. Regardless, we do need to hurry this up. While I am here, I cannot be anywhere else in the system.”

“The system?” Fowl asked, moving to stand next to Max.

A weird laugh that caused Zisathass’s neck to bulge and sounded like air clapping inside came from the robed creature.

“I forget. Your kind knows little of all this. I cannot share too much, but yes, there are millions of other worlds, and I need to be ready for any who find my home. Now, choose which of you will get the reward and open the box. I am interested to see what the tower has gifted.”

“What do you mean which of us?” Tanila asked as she moved to Max’s other side. “Only one of us gets a reward?”

Zisathass nodded, his three fingers tapping on the yellow stone. “Only one may gain the reward, and it will be a temporary boon inside the tower. For as long as it lasts, it will help you and your party. Be warned, though, it will not work outside the tower.”

“How are we going to choose who gets the reward? Do we like flip a coin or something?”

Cordellia’s question was the same one everyone else had. Taking charge, Tanila motioned for everyone to gather around her. “I think it’s simple. Outside of Seth, if we gave one person a reward, how could one item change everything?”

Smiling, Max motioned with his eyes at Fowl, who hadn't noticed his gesture.

"You're probably right," Batrire said. "Nothing I get could be that great, and Cordellia would have to get something super special to make her any better. No offense."

Their archer laughed and waved her hand at the comment. "Don't worry, I agree with you. Tanila and Seth are already doing most of the work, so I agree with you on passing."

Fowl turned his head and saw Max and Tanila smiling at him. "Are you serious? I get to open the box?" His eyes were wide, and it was obvious he was in shock and a little excited.

"Don't take it wrong," Max replied. "As much as I'd like to take something or Tanila acquire it, right now, we need you to be able to help more. Maybe it will be a helmet that shows off your beautiful face."

Everyone chuckled except Fowl, who scowled at Max and gave him the middle finger.

"Please… we need to hurry," Zisathass said. "I have other worlds to be in."

Max grabbed Fowl's shoulders and turned his friend, pushing him toward the stone pillar and the black box where the reward was waiting.

Slowly, Fowl made his way toward the yellow stone that was about four feet tall and two feet square. Its texture looked like nothing he had ever seen, and power radiated from it.

"Do not be afraid," Zisathass said again.

Everyone watched as the orange-robed creature shook from side to side in what he assumed was anticipation. It appeared more excited about whatever could be in it.

"You really don't know what is in the box?" Fowl asked as he stood on the opposite side of Zisathass and put a hand near the black box. Waves of power radiated from it, and Fowl giggled for a second.

"Hurry it up," Batrire snapped. "I wanna see what you got, and this Zathithas–"

"Zisathass!" their host snapped, cutting off Batrire.

"That's what I said," their healer replied, matching the glare the snake-like creature was giving her.

Fowl touched the lid of the black box, and Zisathass stopped whatever reply had been about to come. His attention was now fully focused on the tiny lid Fowl was about to open.

Taking a deep breath, their dwarf warrior let it out slowly, preparing to use his thumb to open the small four-inch-by-four lid. It felt like metal yet had a smooth touch.

As the lid popped open, the swirling vortex of color for a dimensional space swirled, yet nothing appeared inside. Shapes contorted and shifted, never staying around for more than a moment.

"Reach inside. It will come to you then!" Zisathass said, gyrating on the other side of the stone, forked tongue coming out with every word.

Putting his fingers into the swirling area, something washed over and through Fowl as if peering inside his entire being. Suddenly, the box grew wider. The yellow platform began to sink a foot or more, and the black box continued to grow. Though it was only about four inches deep, it was soon over two feet square, and Fowl's hand was inside it, wrapped around something thick.

Zisathass's gold eyes glowed as he watched Fowl and the box. That tongue continued to wave about in the air. "Pull! Pull it out!"

Yanking without regard for what it might be, Fowl pulled out a gold chest plate. It shimmered with a radiant glow and emanated light.

"Holy elf tits," Max muttered quietly as he watched Fowl stare at it in shock and surprise.

"Impressive! Truly impressive!" Zisathass shouted, now dancing from side to side. "An exceptional reward!"

Fowl's mouth was open, his stubby hands trembling as he held the chest before him.

"Put it on, you fool," Batrire said with a slight groan, "and tell us the stats!"

Their dwarven warrior's eyes were fixated on the piece of armor, wondering what in the world he had been given. Suddenly, they went wider than it seemed possible, and his hands clinched the armor tightly.

"Dear Ockrim… you do love me," Fowl whispered quietly.

[*Inspect Armor*]

*****

Golden Breastplate of the Tower

+100 Strength, Constitution, Dexterity

50% Damage Mitigation against larger enemies

Regeneration Affect

Unmovable

Shatters upon reaching being able to enter Tower Floor #10

Bonded

*****

"Impossible!" Cordellia exclaimed after Fowl shared the stats.

"Holy goblin nuts! Next time, I'm not passing on loot," Max said, grinning at Fowl, who was still in shock and had just equipped it. Their dwarven warrior's body seemed to emanate the same glow as before and was now flexing.

"What the hell kind of item is this? I only get it for seven more floors?"

Zisathass began to choke, hissing and spitting as the creature's three fingers made a fist and pounded its chest.

“Seven levels! You get to keep it for seven levels?!”

The surprise and amazement of that seemed weird, and Fowl nodded slowly. “Is that not common?”

Shaking its head, Zisathass began to turn around, scratching its scaled scalp with its claws. “No… one level usually, occasionally two, and rarely three! To get seven levels… that is,” Zisathass paused and moved quicker than Fowl had expected, almost in his face before he could react. Which god spends so much to bless you like this?”

Fowl stumbled a step backward, trying not to use the weapon on the creature, which was awfully close now.

“It’s not me!” Fowl replied loudly. He continued to scramble backward to get a little room from the orange-robed snake

Max saw Zisathass studying the group. Its attention no longer just focused on Fowl. A clawed finger scratched the bottom of its long chin for a moment before taking a step back.

“Very well, take your treasure and go. Just remember that it will shatter the moment you pass the level it was designed for! Do not try to take it out of your dimensional space if you are not in the tower. Items like that are designed only for in here!”

Nodding slowly, Fowl watched Zisathass move behind him and push against his back.

“Time to go… someone else needs me, and you all have been here long enough.”

Like a child whose parents were ready for them to be gone, everyone in the party felt a power coming from Zisathass and couldn’t keep a solid foot on the ground. The creature used some magical force to push them all along the stone floor, into the door, and out of the tower.

“What the hell, Seth?” Fowl yelled as the two of them slammed into each other in the courtyard they had just left

Blinking his eyes to help with the change in light, Max stood against his dwarven friend on the stone blocks of the inner walled courtyard.

“Uh… what?” Max asked as he watched Fowl spin around and face him.

“The door! It’s gone!” exclaimed Tanila.

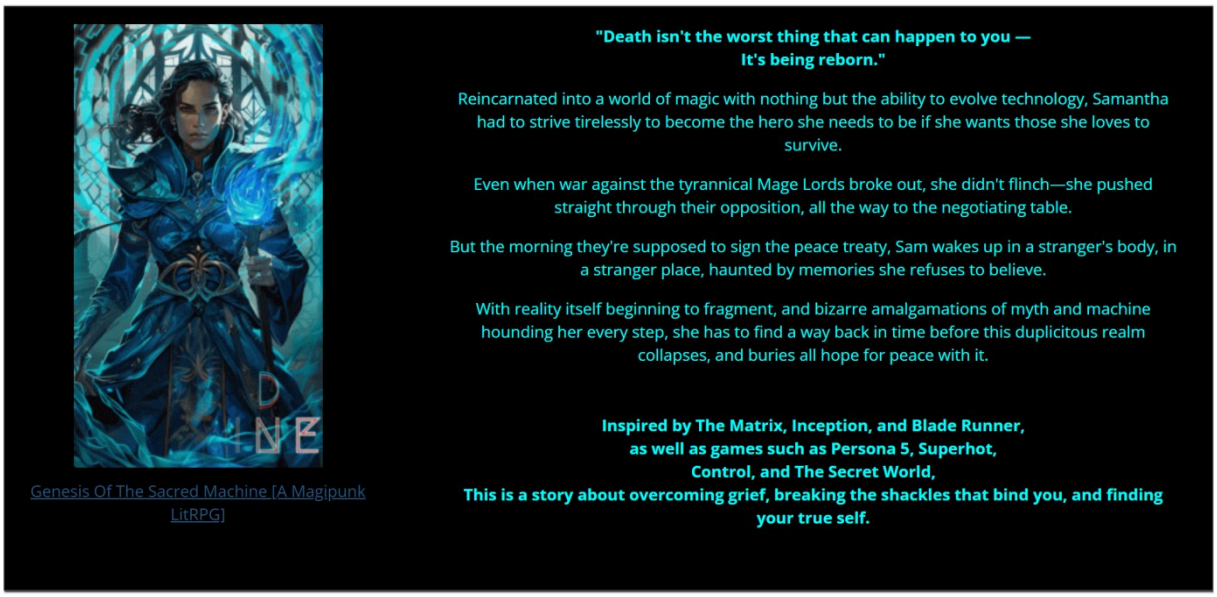
Fowl grunted as both of them turned to see that Tanila was right. The wooden door was gone. Now, the entire tower was one solid piece of stone.

“What happened?” Batrire asked, her eyes locked on Fowl and his new chest piece.

Everyone shook their head, and for a moment, Fowl was the center of their attention.

182 - A New Dwarf Is Born[182 - A New Dwarf Is Born - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


Genesis Of The Sacred Machine [A Magipunk LitRPG]
"Death isn't the worst thing that can happen to you —
It's being reborn."
Reincarnated into a world of magic with nothing but the ability to evolve technology, Samantha had to strive tirelessly to become the hero she needs to be if she wants those she loves to survive.
Even when war against the tyrannical Mage Lords broke out, she didn't flinch—she pushed straight through their opposition, all the way to the negotiating table.
But the morning they're supposed to sign the peace treaty, Sam wakes up in a stranger's body, in a stranger place, haunted by memories she refuses to believe.
With reality itself beginning to fragment, and bizarre amalgamations of myth and machine hounding her every step, she has to find a way back in time before this duplicitous realm collapses, and buries all hope for peace with it.
Inspired by The Matrix, Inception, and Blade Runner,
as well as games such as Persona 5, Superhot,
Control, and The Secret World,
This is a story about overcoming grief, breaking the shackles that bind you, and finding your true self.

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/88958/genesis-of-the-sacred-machine

The knowledge that only Fowl ended up with an item made everyone slightly envious, especially after they considered the stats it gave.

Finding the exit had taken a little bit. Three hours passed before they found it inside a crumbling house. No other creatures were on the tower floor, all apparently having been summoned by the rare werewolf.

The gems had been shared and used, turning everyone level three in the tower experience while getting Cordellia to level five. She had also reached level fifty-six while everyone else was now level fifty-two.

“I’m just saying, we sleep tonight in our beds and come back tomorrow,” Fowl argued. “Going in for a few hours and camping in a zone makes no sense. Why take a risk when we can easily eat, sleep, and crap in our own place.”

Everyone in the carriage laughed, knowing that Fowl was indeed right, yet hearing him use his brain like this made it even funnier.

They arrived at the tower early the next morning, quickly entering as a group.

“This is going to suck,” Max said as they peered at the tower floor before them.

Tombstones, crypts, and broken mausoleums were as far as they could see. A thin layer of fog hovered along the ground, and a half-moon illuminated the fog, helping to hide anything that might be inside it.

“You don’t like undead?” Cordellia asked, frowning a little.

“He does not,” Fowl said, winking at Max, who was trying to ignore his dwarf friend. They are one of the few things that make his life difficult. He’s not nearly as strong against them.”

Bobbing his head, Max changed out his gear, pointing to the hammer side of his halberd. “What our short dwarven friend is trying to say,” Max said, “is that my abilities don’t work the same on them.”

“Which means we’ll have to work together as a team instead of letting him do all the work.”

Cordellia smiled and nodded, enjoying how much Fowl seemed to get a kick out of what was going on.

Fowl grinned, put on his new chest piece, and created a circle of light that radiated about twenty yards around him.

“Who the heck is this dwarf, and what happened to my gloomy warrior?” Batrire asked, winking at Fowl, who was grinning ear to ear.

“Shame this didn’t work last night in our room,” Fowl said. “I really wanted to wear it to bed.”

“To help her find it?” Max asked.

Batrire snickered, and Fowl held up his stubby middle finger at Max.

“Are you two boys done?” Tanila asked. “I’d like to actually do some fighting at some point.”

“I’m ready whenever,” Max replied.

Fowl pointed at the pack of seven undead that were closest to them. The group was slowly meandering around, moving like they would eventually move around the outer edge of the entire floor.

“Three archers, two zombies, and two skeletons. I’m a bit concerned by the zombies' lack of weapons and how bloated they look,” Fowl stated as he loosened his shoulders. Those warriors on the skeleton side look different. It could be the green bones and weapons they have.”

Max nodded and frowned. “Doubt stealth works as the undead almost always see through it. That leaves a frontal assault. Archer will be a pain. Have the girls shoot and spell them while you handle the two skeletons?”

“What the heck are you going to do?” Fowl asked.

“I’ll take out the two zombies. Surely, with your new breastplate and the fact everything we face is taller than you, nothing should hurt.”

Tanila snorted and motioned she was ready.

Fowl chuckled, rotated his shoulders, and then let out a small yell, turning his attention back toward the undead.

Tanila started casting her spell as Fowl ran forward, shouting and banging his weapon against his shield. The undead turned from their slow walk and ran toward the dwarven warrior.

Arrows plinked off his shield and armor, causing the dwarf to laugh as the two skeletons reached him first.

Max moved past the two after they started swinging their swords at Fowl, finding him to be much tougher than most might realize.

Their green swords caused a cloud of smoke every time they hit Fowl or his shield.

Max smiled as the massive ball of fire Tanila sent at the archers landed amongst them. Cordellia’s arrow attacks only seemed to inflict any real damage if she hit the head of the skeleton.

Both zombies were now close to Max, who held his weapon in both hands. Setting his feet, and swung it like he was trying to send them into the heavens.

A sound came as both bodies exploded, bits of rotten flesh going everywhere as two massive clouds of green gas covered the area he was in.

Immediately, Max's skin felt weird, and his eyes started to water. Keeping his mouth closed, Max ran out of the cloud that seemed to be dissipating and made his way toward the skeletons, beating on Fowl.

His dwarven friend laughed. Fowl’s hammer was crushing bones with every strike, and everyone could see just how much a hundred boost in strength was giving him. The increase in Fowl’s dexterity also made him move faster, dodging and blocking with ease while dishing out damage he wasn’t used to doing.

Fowl slammed his red hammer against the skeleton on the right, hitting it in its chest, shattering its bones, and another cloud of green smoke poofed out.

“God!” Fowl exclaimed as he smelled the smoke.

Fowl repeated the attack on the second skeleton without hesitating, destroying it in a single hit.

Both of them backed up from the clouds that were forming around the bones.

“What the heck… is that?” Fowl asked, coughing once as he spoke.

“It’s a disease!” Batrire shouted. “Now finish that last archer!”

Both of them turned and saw one archer still standing.

Tanila had a stone wall out, stopping the arrows it was shooting, and tiny clouds of green smoke were coming from each shot when they struck it.

Cordellia was coughing a little bit, and Max realized she had actually been shot.

Racing across the ground, Max reached the archer, dodging the arrow it sent at him. One swing later, another pile of bones was created.

Max jogged back, avoiding the clouds of gas that were finally starting to dissipate. Batrire cast a spell on Cordellia and then scowled playfully.

“That’s going to be awfully annoying,” Cordellia said, taking a deep breath and not coughing. “A disease attack… with a cloud effect?”

Fowl’s hit points were topped off, and Batrire hadn’t even healed him. Their new and improved dwarven tank had more hit points than Max could imagine, and if the chest piece gave the same regeneration rate he had, it would mean Batrire was going to be able to focus on everyone else for a while.

“What’s more annoying is that Seth can one-shot each of those,” Fowl said. “I was finally hoping to carry us all.”

“I think we’re actually glad you can carry your own weight,” Tanila replied as she studied Fowl. “That reward you got seems impossible to imagine. If stuff after tower level fifty is close to that, we are in for a treat.”

Max nodded and remembered what Tanila had told him last night when they were alone in their room.

“No one shares those stats, though, and even Everett and Tom won’t tell us what items are like on tower level fifty-one and beyond.”

“Can we stop talking and start fighting?” Fowl asked, shifting excitedly from side to side. “I really want to see what I can do.”

As Max and Fowl took off toward the next pack, Tanila nudged Batrire with her elbow.

“I wish that chest had given him some intelligence. You do realize he’s going to be pretty upset when that item disappears.”

Frowning, Batrire nodded. “He says he knows, but the truth is, he really doesn’t understand what it’s going to be like.”

The grin on Fowl’s face never disappeared as he waded into groups of six and seven skeletons at a time, letting them damage themselves against his thorn aura and crushed them quickly with his hammer and newfound strength. The disease cloud that came each time one was defeated couldn’t overcome his massive constitution, which was now over three hundred.

Max continually praised and encouraged his friend, laughing as the two of them tore through every pack of creatures that assaulted them.

“Pack of three casters and six skeletons!” Fowl shouted as he scouted ahead.

“Hold up!” Batrire yelled back. “Give us a moment to get set up!”

Only Max could hear Fowl’s groan as he shifted anxiously, waiting on the other three.

“Slow down. I know what you’re feeling,” Max said. “You feel invulnerable and able to take on everything, but remember, we found out the hard way that I wasn’t a few times. We also need to be careful not to let our friends back there get hurt.”

Sighing, Fowl finally frowned, seeing Max’s concerned expression. “I know… it’s just… for the first time in so long, I feel like I can actually do something. Like I’m really contributing.”

Max put a hand on his friend's shoulder and patted it a few times. “Only you feel like you're not doing anything. Without you, neither of our friends back there would be alive. You’ve kept them safe, taking injuries that would have killed most and sacrificed yourself before,” Max replied. “Don’t forget you almost died once trying to keep them alive. Just keep on being the dwarf we love.”

“How do you do it?” Fowl asked as he glanced back at Batrire and saw her recasting her buff.

“Do what?”

“Keep a steady head? I mean, I know you do stupid stuff, but I can’t imagine how it must feel to be able to do everything you can.”

Taking a deep breath, Max slowly let out, “Honestly, it’s hard—just like you feel it right now. I was being stupid on that flower floor, but everything felt easy. That same overconfidence almost got us all killed on the werewolf floor. I’m not perfect, but I try to remember one thing.”

Max motioned with his head at the three behind them. “I got people I love and care about. As a warrior, we both know how we would feel if someone died because we were stupid.”

Grunting, Fowl nodded and playfully punched Max to the side, wincing when he moved Max slightly. “Sorry!”

Laughing, Max rubbed his side and pretended to be hurt.

“Bah, I can see your health bar!” Fowl said.

“Stop fooling around!” Tanila called out. “We’re ready when you two are!”

“Go get 'em, wonderboy,” Max said, giving Fowl a push.

Running toward the pack of skeletons, Fowl roared.

“Damn, that one looks a bit harder,” Fowl stated as he pointed his hammer at the massive skeleton fifty yards away.

Bobbing his head, Max studied the twenty-foot-tall skeleton. Its bones were red, and it was covered in red plate armor. Each of its hands held a massive red sword that appeared to be over seven feet long.

“Can you see that aura around it?”

Max saw what Fowl was getting at. It stood in a circle of tombstones, and a slight red haze seemed to emanate from its lower half, filling the fog with a red tint.

“You two seem cautious,” Cordellia stated. “Should we be concerned?”

Tapping his chest, Fowl shook his head. “I’m not, but as a warrior, it’s our job to make sure we protect you all. Just wanted to ensure that everyone knows what to do.”

Batrire snickered and winked when Fowl turned to stare at her. “Lead on, my love. It just feels funny to hear you talk like that.”

“I don’t see any other creatures with it,” Tanila pointed out. “We think it can be that easy?”

Max shrugged and motioned at Fowl. “He’ll deal with the boss. I’ll handle anything that might come our way.”

“Just let me get its attention, and then you can all start attacking,” Fowl said as he started to loosen up his shoulder. “Hopefully, I won't have to use any skills.”

Groaning, Batrire shook her head. “And there’s the jinx.”

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A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

Book 3 hits Amazon TODAY!

I want to say thank you to each of you who continue to follow the story and show love!

If you're willing, take a moment and write an advanced review on Amazon. Since you've read book 3, if you really liked it, help me out with a solid jump on the launch! Feel free to even read it again :)

Book 4 is out in two months (Sept 1st), and Book 5 is done and slated for Nov 1st! It's been a crazy year, and I'm grateful for all of you!

((If all goes well, Book 6 may be out after Christmas and before New Years!))

Fowl rushed toward the giant skeleton, and when he got within twenty-five yards, the creature roared and came running at him. Its massive red feet shook the ground as it raced toward Fowl, kicking up clouds of dirt.

It swung both swords in a combo attack, and Fowl blocked and parried them as they came from both sides.

Max had watched, wondering what kind of damage it might cause. Other than the roar the skeleton let out as their weapons collided, Fowl was still in full health.

Attack after attack came as the boss slashed, swung, thrust, and kicked at Fowl, each one getting blocked or parried.

He’s doing really well.

Max smiled and moved to help when he saw black and red flames begin to appear around the giant skeleton.

“Look out!”

Still, twenty yards away from the boss, Max moved back a few steps, unsure what was about to be cast.

A wave of fire rolled out from the boss, engulfing Fowl, who tried to hide behind his two shields. He had quickly swapped out his weapon for the added protection. The fire almost reached Max before stopping a few yards away.

Their dwarf’s health bar went down about twenty percent, and Max watched as the boss began to attack again, not pausing for a moment other than when the fire had poured out.

Slowly, Fowl’s hit points began to creep up, and Max moved forward again, ready to help.

A massive ice spear came from Tanila and slammed into the skeleton's red chest piece.

It shrieked. A tiny hole had appeared in the armor, but it didn’t appear fazed at all. Kicking at Fowl, the boss then slammed one of its swords into the dirt, and a wave of power went out around it.

Dirt began to shift, and Max dodged a skeleton hand clawing from underneath the ground, slamming his weapon on it and shattering it.

For twenty meters, dozens of other hands came up from the soil, pushing aside the black dirt.

“We got adds!” Max shouted, changing his focus from the boss to the smaller skeletons now a third of the way out of the ground.

Each of them was red like the boss, and when Max shattered the top half of one, a gout of flame rose up, burning him slightly.

[Regeneration]

The fire hurt enough that Max knew he needed to keep his regeneration skill activated as he cast Ice Nova, preparing for the onslaught of more skeletons.

“Tell me if I need to taunt!” Fowl shouted. Now, back to using a hammer and shield, he landed blows against the skeleton's armored legs.

No matter how hard the boss seemed to hit Fowl, no damage beyond its original spell seemed to be done, and the chest's Unmovable ability kept him right up against the boss towering over him.

It stomped downward on Fowl, and the dwarf warrior held his shield over his head at an angle, taking the force of the blow and directing it to the side. His hammer hit the bone foot, and a small chip came out.

Max’s ice spell garnered the attention of the skeletons, who had now dug themselves free and turned to face him.

They had no weapons, just red bone fingers that tried to grasp and hold onto Max as he weaved and dodged around them, slamming the hammer portion of his weapon into each one that came close.

Between the slow effect of his frost nova and his dexterity, Max had killed over half a dozen, avoiding most of the fire that came when they died.

Still no stat gains… what the hell gives?

Ignoring that thought, Max was halfway through the two dozen-plus red skeletons when the boss let out a roar far greater than before.

Max felt the power of an intimidation shout attack his mind but easily shrugged it off.

Fowl, on the other hand, stumbled and stopped moving, his shield held slightly before him.

The red skeletons Max was fighting turned brighter, almost illuminating in some way, and began to move faster, keeping up with him now.

His evasion skill was working overtime as his sonar told him where attacks came from, clawed hands reaching for him and trying to grab hold.

Fowl’s health bar began to dip, and he was no longer able to stop the onslaught of swords that began to slash against his armor.

A giant ice spear plunged through the horde of red skeletons pressing against Max from all sides, sending up plumes of fire when they exploded. Max knew Fowl was in trouble, yet he couldn’t get through these minions to help his dwarf friend.

Arrows began to rain down around him, giving Max a small breather as he whirled around like a top, letting his hammer smack into everything nearby and feeling the heat of the flames of those skeletons that had died.

His sonar told him a stone ramp was to his backside, giving him a perch to get from out of the group of ten-plus skeletons.

Racing toward the stone ramp, Max saw that Tanila was using her air wall to try and stop the attacks.

Casting his stone wall, Max attached it to the portion Tanila had created, angling it at the boss and gaining about fourteen feet of height in the air between the two of them stacked together.

The boss didn’t pay attention to Max. Its focus was completely on the dwarf it kicked, slashed, and stomped on. Fowl’s health was below fifty percent, and Max wondered how much longer his friend had before he broke free from the boss's intimidation.

[Power Strike]

[Rampage]

No part of the skeleton was really exposed. The back and head were covered with plate armor, yet each time it swung, a small piece of its spine was exposed for just a moment near its head.

Letting his skill and sonar direct him, Max lept toward the boss, slamming the hammer portion of his halberd into the neck as it slashed both swords against his disabled friend.

A crack sounded as his weapon connected with the first attack, the second and third hitting right after, as bone fragments shattered from the combination. The boss staggered forward, moving past Fowl, and dropped a sword as it went to its knees. The free left hand grabbed the back of its neck.

Max spun, attacking the horde of skeletons still coming at him as he sensed a massive boulder falling from the sky, landing on the bent-over boss.

Fowl’s hit points were going back up, and Max cast another ice nova, his sonar telling him the boss was almost pushed against the ground from Tanila’s spell.

Swinging his halberd, two red skeletons died, their flames burning him slightly as he ran toward the boss.

The left arm's armor fell to the ground, and bones from the arm were now reinforcing the boss’s neck.

“Hit it with everything!” Max shouted as he began to draw mana into an ice spear.

Slamming his hammer over and over into the back of the boss’s neck area, trying to bash through the armor that was protecting it, Max watched as it started to rise, using its right hand to push itself off the ground.

As its helm rose from the dirt, Max changed directions of his swing and slammed the weapon upward, sending the boss’s head snapping backward and exposing its face.

His spear and Tanila’s both struck the exposed bones, a charged arrow from Cordellia impacting at the same time.

“Taunting!” Fowl shouted, back to normal, gaining the attention of the remaining red skeleton minions and the boss.

It turned to look at Fowl, overcome by the magic of the ability.

Max didn’t let the chance pass, delivering blow after blow against its exposed face as it struggled to turn toward Fowl and get up.

Another boulder came from Tanila, and Max saw it land on the boss’s legs, pinning it to the ground as he continued the assault on the boss’s head.

Fragments and chunks of bone fell as he rained destruction upon it. After a four-hit combo, he focused on the right hand and arm, trying to help it rise. The boss fell facefirst into the dirt again.

Jumping onto its back, Max cast an air wall, pinning the boss’s helm to the earth.

Seven strikes later, its neck shattered.

Breathing heavily, Max turned and saw as the remaining red skeletons all exploded in a pillar of fire, encircling Fowl with flames.

“Gods, that’s hot!” the dwarf warrior shouted from the middle of the circle of fire.

Sighing, Max tried to figure out what to grab from the boss. After storing his weapon, he jumped down and grabbed the head still in its helmet.

Lifting it from the ground, Max grinned as it vanished into his storage.

“That wasn’t fun at all,” Fowl muttered as he watched Max stick the three yellow crystals from the chest that had appeared into storage. “Why is it I can’t withstand that ability?”

“Because you’re weak-minded,” Batrire replied. “Don’t worry though, I still love you.”

Cordellia chuckled and tapped her head. “I’m in the same boat. How you three always seem to resist boggles my mind. Eventually, we can find items that prevent it, but we’ll need to go higher for those.”

“Or ask Everett,” Fowl muttered.

“He won’t do that,” Tanila said. “From the beginning, he told us that we needed to learn to climb on our own without depending on their magical gear.”

Sighing, Max frowned at not getting any stats or skills from the kill. “Are we ready to finish looking for the portal?”

“What if another boss is around? Maybe it will have something nice,” Fowl said. It seems unfair that we didn’t get any drops besides crystals.”

“Says the dwarf in a golden chest plate,” Batrire replied.

Max motioned to some mausoleums that were barely noticeable on the tower floor. “Let’s stop complaining and just see what we can find. In the end, we’re not really worried about this zone. It’s the next one that we need to focus on.”

With a grunt of acknowledgment from Fowl and a thumbs up from Tanila, the group began moving toward the buildings Max had pointed at.

“Nothing… not even another boss,” Fowl muttered as he stared at the portal, ignoring the others who were picking up the gems from the last fight.

“I’m sorry,” Max said as he motioned to Fowl. “I now know what I must have been like.”

Everyone laughed and nodded, getting a groan, however, from Fowl.

“I’m just saying…” their dwarven warrior said.

Max stood in the room they always turned in items gathered during their tower runs. The others had already headed back to their rooms to clean up and change.

“That’s an impressive helm and skull,” Tom said as he carefully inspected it. “This metal isn’t one we’ve seen before that I know of.”

Everett nodded, making a note on a clipboard. “That boss sounds pretty awful. I guess the real question is, are you five ready for the next level?”

Nodding, Max motioned to the three crystals on the table near the helm. “How many more till we can get another ability upgraded?”

Tom chuckled, and both men watched Everett as the older man frowned.

“That’s not really a fair question,” Everett replied. “I mean, technically, we could offer it. The power your group has gained is well beyond the curve of typical parties in the tower. We had to trade one for some items from another faction, but getting our crafting area fixed was a top priority.”

“What did happen? You never mentioned what caused that explosion.”

Everett’s face looked pained as his eyes scrunched, and another frown appeared on his face. “We lost two of our alchemists on top of a few others,” Everett replied a shift in his tone at the end. “They were brewing something for a higher level in the tower. The nature of it was more explosive than expected, and even with the airflow system we had in place, a build-up of unexpected proportions of fumes ignited and…” Everett trailed off, wincing at the thought of what had happened.

“Are you actively looking for new crafters?”

Tom started to laugh and shook his head. “Every Faction is looking for new crafters, son. Finding one's worth having is something else. We could try to poach a few, but that leads to bad relationships and problems later in the tower.”

“If I knew someone looking for a crafting position, what kind of deal would that be worth?”

Everett lowered his clipboard, now interested in the conversation at Max’s question. “Like a reward for finding someone? We’re talking epic or higher skilled, and those aren’t just walking around the world without a place to call home.”

“Holy ogre nuts,” Tom cursed, studying Max as Everett spoke. “You know someone!”

“Maybe, but what’s in it for me?” Max replied.

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A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

Check out this awesome story now on Amazon! Love the author as she's a great friend![https://www.royalroad.com/amazon/B0D3N46VWX]

Library System Reset: Overdue [A System Rebuilding Isekai LitRPG]

The Library once stood proud as a beacon of magic and power.

For 500 years, it has been broken.

Quinn can barely handle her own life. When the Library of Everywhere discovers her compatible magical signature, suddenly she is the sole existing potential Librarian. Now it's not only the weight of her world on her shoulders—Quinn must connect with the Library system before the universe itself disintegrates.

Once she's settled, it should be quiet, peaceful work- just as soon as she battles a few engorged bookworms, repairs hundreds of years of damage, and figures out why there's been no Librarian for the last several centuries.

And once that's done she can start gathering overdue books. All 18,042 of them to start with. There'll be a helluva lot of late fees to process.

"What's in it for you besides our goodwill and gear down the road?" Tom asked. "I mean, you seem to think we need to give you more than we already do."

Everett held up his hand, storing the clipboard and moving to the stone counter where the two other men were standing.

"Wait, I'm curious," Everett said, his eyes focused intently on Max. "You're telling me that you might have access to a homeless epic crafter?"

"Is that a problem?"

Taking a massive breath, the Faction leader let it out slowly as he rubbed his eyes.

"I'm not sure you can imagine the improbability of finding someone like that. What it takes to become a crafter like that is almost impossible. The time spent in dungeons, money invested… it's just begging how they got where they are. Everyone would wonder who or what they are running from."

"Exactly!" Tom exclaimed. "Someone spent a lot of money investing in that person, and for them to… why are you smiling like that?"

"Do you want to meet them or not? I'll tell you how the guild can improve and grow, but you'll have to wait to find out how all this happened," Max informed Tom. "They would prefer no questions asked, privacy, and being open to making things on their own. Trading for materials is what they want also."

Putting both hands on the stone counter, Everett leaned against it, shaking his head slowly. "Anyone else but you and I would probably kick you out… yet Tom is right. I can tell you have something and someone in mind. When can they come?"

"Tonight, I'll go and let them know. Just know this," Max replied, his tone changing as he spoke. "He doesn't like questions and won't just join the faction. Maybe in time, but for now, he'll craft weapons and take payment in materials."

Tom stared at Everett and watched his friend try to deal with the situation before them.

"Everett?"

Slowly, the Faction leader turned and held Tom's gaze, nodding slowly. "We need to. You and I both know it." Everett stood up, shaking slightly and appearing to be struggling with something Max felt still had to come from the loss of Baldin. "Tell them to come by and ask for me. I'll be waiting."

Nodding, Max moved toward the door. "I'll go tell my friend."

After the door shut, both men stood in silence, staring at the closed door.

"He at least believes the person he is going to get is a crafter. You're really going to give them a shot?"

Everett nodded at Tom's question and frowned. "Either that kid is a magnet for gold, or someone is fooling him. Either way, we'll find out tonight."

"I must say that when you told me we couldn't stay at the Faction house tonight, I hadn't expected you to leave me here by myself."

Max kissed Tanila and shrugged. "We both talked about this, and the day before we attempt the fifth floor, I need to see what materials I can get. You and I both know that in order to someday craft what we were given, I have to find out what materials will even work with it."

"It's a good thing you are so handsome, or I might be mad," Tanila replied, kissing Max. "Now go. I'll force myself to enjoy this massive tub and the food you were smart enough to order. When should I expect you?"

"Tomorrow morning."

As Max prepared to turn the handle, Tanila called out, "Remember what I said? Act totally different, walk differently, and try to hide your voice. The item you have only does so much. If you don't pretend to be someone else completely, they may realize it is you."

"I understand. Watching you change in a moment when you reveal yourself made me believe I could do this also."

"So you're Seth's friend?" Tom asked. "Why isn't he here?"

Max shrugged and ran a hand through his brown hair, grinning like a fool. "He mentioned something about spending the night with his female friend. I didn't pry and raced over to see if you two were interested."

"And you can craft?"

"We can dance or go to a crafting area, and I can show you. Honestly, I'd prefer to skip the dancing portion and just show you what I can do."

Everett cleared his throat and nodded. "Alright, Joshua. Let's see what you can do."

Max stood in the room, grateful for one that had magical controls of the forge, not requiring him or anyone else to keep it heated. On a table were an assortment of reagents and materials, all calling out to his skill.

“What would you like crafted? A dagger? A sword?”

Tom ran his tongue over his teeth as he watched Max standing next to the items they put out. Years of watching Baldin's work had given both of them the knowledge of what could be crafted, and depending on what was made, they already knew the quality to expect.

“You’re pick. We’ll just watch while you work.”

Max grinned again and nodded. He slowly limped toward the table, doing his best to move differently and even hunching his back slightly.

He could feel Tom and Everett's gaze as he moved along the table. Three of the ore bars they had were not very good and would be decent for an uncommon item, maybe rare at best with his skill. Two other bars would be useful for an epic-quality weapon, and mixed between all of them was one bar that would be legendary-worthy.

Other items sat on the table, including possible handle choices and even a box. Opening it up slowly, Max tried not to appear shocked when he saw some different elemental essences inside.

Holy goblin shite… they’re really going all out on this test!

His mind began to work at the possibilities of what he might be able to make. His skill told him that it would take about twelve hours to craft a single dagger with a simple handle and one of the elemental essences. If his luck held and everything went right, it might just turn out legendary instead of epic.

“This is going to take a bit. Do either of you mind getting me some water and a snack?”

Tom didn’t hesitate, moving from his stool, pulling some food and a water skin from storage, and setting it near Max.

“Thanks.”

A grunt came as Tom sat back down.

After a long drink and a quick snack, Max picked up the ore he had chosen. It was pink, and he could feel it begging to be shaped into the image in his mind.

“Time to get to work.”

The hours passed quickly, and at the halfway point, Max had formed his blade and was working on his handle.

Tom was not happy when he stored the blade, but Everett held up a hand. They knew it worked that way for one with a skill as Max claimed to have.

“That was impressive metalworking, Joshua,” Everett said as he watched Max start working on the handle. “Are you done with the blade?”

Shaking his head slightly, Max didn’t look up. Using his tools, he was focused on carving the bone handle he had selected. Unsure what type of bone it was, his skill had told him that it would be perfect for housing the power of both the blade and elemental essence.

Almost done, Max put on a metal glove sitting on the counter and opened the box once more, pulling the ice element from inside. Transferring it quickly to his storage, he made his way to the blade that was held fast in the clamp.

He could feel the eyes of both men, fighting back the fatigue their faces showed, watching as he stood over the blade.

“Now for the tricky part,” Max muttered. Taking the elemental essence out, he laid it on the blade and took an essence tool, dragging it slowly back and forth along the blade, watching its power start to enter.

Slow… move slow…

His mind told him the truth about how important it was to be steady of hand and fast. This wasn’t the time to race; with each pass of the essence along the blade that he had etched with a few runes, a little more entered the pink metal.

After over a hundred more passes with the essence as it was almost gone, it vanished, and the blade shimmered blue for a moment.

Each man in the room let out a breath at the same time, all of them holding it during the last few moments.

With that part done, Max moved to the final part.

He sharpened it and did everything required except wipe it down one last time.

Holding the rag that finished the dagger, Max grinned and gave it a quick wipe.

[10 Experience Gained]

[Legendary Dagger Created]

“I don’t believe it,” Tom said, moving from his stool. “You really are a weaponsmith!”

Yawning, Max nodded and handed the blade to Tom. “I haven’t checked its stats, but I’m ok with that. Did I pass the test?”

Tom’s eyes widened, accentuating the bags under his eyes as he stared at the stats.

He turned, moved to Everett, and handed the dagger to him, watching as his friend’s face reacted in shock at what he was holding.

“Joshua… you’re a legendary crafter… how?”

“I thought we agreed on no questions,” Max replied. “I’m happy to offer my services for materials. As you can see, I can make quality weapons.”

Both men looked at the dagger and then at each other, each one nodding.

“We did agree upon that, but we honestly didn’t believe you were a crafter… or not one as high as Seth said you were.”

Max was putting his tools away, wrapping them up, and storing them. “I understand. I work on my own schedule just so you know. I’ll show up when I can and do what you want, but please remember our agreement.”

“You realize that if you signed up with us, we could offer you far more than just crafting items,” Tom said, his voice almost pleading. “I’m certain you know that every other Faction–”

“I don’t want that life,” Max said, waving his hand and cutting Tom off. “In life, we all want certain things. For me, it’s crafting items. Beyond that, I don’t need a home of my own right now.”

Storing the dagger, Everett stood up and moved to where Max was, holding out his hand.

“I agree with your terms, Weaponsmith Joshua. I’ll start creating a list of items we need and the required materials. The next time you come, I’ll have them ranked in order of importance. Do you have any idea when that might be?”

Max shook his head. “I don’t, but hopefully, it will be in a few days. I promised someone else I would help them.”

“Help them?” Tom asked, wincing after he realized what he had done.

Grinning, Max nodded. “Count that item as free. You don’t owe me for this one, but I’ll slowly start figuring out what materials I want. I’ll need a list of everything you have and would like to look over all of it. Obviously, I don’t plan on taking the list, but it will help me prepare for it down the road.”

“I’ll see what I can do to meet that request,” Tom said.

“And I mean all items,” Max said as he pointed at the door. “I’m okay working for something that costs more. Now, if you don’t mind, can someone lead me out of here? I need to go and sleep.”

Tom nodded, moved toward the door, opened it, and instructed the person outside to take Max to the gate.

“That boy craps gold… no stuff more valuable than gold,” Tom said, leaning his head against the counter. “You and I both knew Joshua could craft the moment he made that blade.”

Everett nodded, inspecting the dagger from every angle. “It’s flawless… a legendary blade with four stats and an ice element. I can think of two people in our ranks who would fight for this.”

“And you’re ok trading materials with that boy? I mean, he doesn’t look that old. How can he do legendary gear already?”

Shrugging, Everett yawned and put the dagger up. “I have no idea, but he isn’t the only one who needs some sleep. I’m turning in.”

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

I just got to say **Thank you!**

Rank 74 on amazon (darn page keeps deleting image!)

This rank is only possible because you all do what you do and have loved on this story! Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine something like this!

I was shaking and bouncing when I saw that image!

Thank you again!

185 - The First Boss Floor in the Tower[185 - The First Boss Floor in the Tower - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

HTTPS://WWW.ROYALROAD.COM/FICTION/89228/RUINOUS-RETURN

“You look like I wore you out all night,” Tanila teased as they rode back in a carriage to the Faction property. “I hope this works out how you think it will.”

Nodding, Max fought back a yawn that tried to make itself known and winked at Tanila. “I could see it in their eyes. The opportunity is too great for them to pass up. You and I both know they will hope in time that they can convince *Joshua* to join the faction. For now, having someone with that ability and willingness to craft for them is massive. You already told me what it would cost them to hire another crafter with that skill from a different Faction or kingdom.”

Sighing, Tanila tapped her fingers together as she watched Max.

“As long as you don’t do it all the time, and eventually I get a night or date with you, I’ll be fine,” she replied. “However, if you continue to spend all your time crafting items, you might not like how that turns out.”

“I won’t, I promise. Now, we need one more day before we go back to the tower for the boss. Any idea what you would like to do?”

Chuckling, Tanila couldn’t help but shake her head slightly.

“Sometimes you’re a fool. Other times, you’re a genius. I’ll let you take a quick nap, and then I’ll have a list of things we can do tonight with Fowl and Batrire.”

“No Cordellia?” Max asked.

Biting her lip, Tanila waited a moment before shaking her head. I’m not sure we’re ready to have her walking around town with us just yet. Maybe in a few more weeks or more.”

Standing up, Max moved over and sat down next to Tanila, holding her hand. “I’ll take all the time I can have with you”

Max regretted giving Tanila complete control over the evening. Fowl complained multiple times that they had both been fitted for another outfit neither of them felt they needed.

The only saving perk was that with a dimensional storage item, neither of them had to carry the twenty different bags the women had picked up between them.

“Do you all understand what tomorrow will be like?” Cordellia asked as they sat at a table in a private dining room in the faction house. “Unlike any other floor we have been on, the boss floors are unpredictable. Worse yet, unless one brings items for every possibility, you don’t have an idea of what will be there.”

“And it's five days if we have to leave the tower floor before killing the boss?” Fowl asked, frowning at Max.

“If we’re lucky. Sometimes it’s a week,” Tanila replied, studying the two looks both men were giving each other. “We still have to fight to get to the boss. We’ll have to check for clues on the boss based on the creatures on the floor.”

Batrire pounded the table with a fist after Tanila finished speaking.

“What the hell is going on with you two? Why are you both looking at each other like that?”

“It’s nothing,” Fowl muttered. “Just a discussion between the two of us.”

Max nodded and then smiled, turning his attention to the three women who obviously didn’t buy whatever they were selling.

“We’ll be ready for tomorrow. The real question we need to consider is how bad things have to get before we actually choose to run for the exit.”

“Are you planning on us losing?” Cordellia asked, her eyes bulging slightly as her head moved back slightly.

“It’s not that,” Fowl said. “We need to be smart. Tomorrow is the first big challenge we might face. The stuff on the tower floors isn’t anything like the bosses. We all know that, and if we walk in expecting to waltz through everything, we’re asking for problems. Everyone here knows what Tom said.”

As a group, each head bobbed at Fowl’s statement.

“Still, we need to consider this the best chance we’ll get at learning how a boss works,” Max added. “After this floor, each boss in the tower is going to get harder and harder. Tomorrow is the first real test.”

No one spoke as they all considered those words again, the exact ones Tom had spoken.

‘Tomorrow is the first real test.’

The five of them stood outside the tower, waiting for a turn as two other groups were before them.

Max couldn’t help but stare at the group of elves, each of them almost giving off an aura of danger as they waited to enter.

A few of the elves glanced back and nodded at Tanila and Cordellia, but none of them paid the other three any attention.

Between the elven group was a mixed group like theirs: two elves, two dwarves, and one human.

Fowl and the dwarf warrior in the other group had chatted a moment, each discussing ale and laughing at some joke Max didn’t get even though he heard it.

“You ok?” Tanila whispered, moving close after the elf group had entered the tower.

“Yeah, I'm just lost in thought. I want to make sure we don’t do something stupid.”

Laughter erupted from Tanila, and everyone turned to try and figure out what was so funny from how loud it had been.

Raising an eyebrow, Max gave her a look, and she waved him off. “Sorry, those words coming from you… my how you have grown.”

Smiling, Max nodded and tapped his head. “It’s from the high intelligence stat.”

Rolling her eyes, Tanila motioned to Cordellia, who was shifting nervously from side to side.

“You ok?”

Taking a deep breath and letting it out, their archer nodded. “First boss… I mean, the first actual boss I believe we’ll defeat. I’ve never actually been on a team that could take one down. Too often, we had to run away or choose to not fight it. Now…” She trailed off and motioned to the open tower portal as the second group had gone in. “Looks like we’re going to find out if the sixth time is the charm.”

Fowl started to cough, shaking his head as his eyes bulged. “Six times?!”

“Don’t worry about it,” Max said. “We got this.”

“Good luck today, tower climbers!” the female guard said as the five of them moved up next to the portal.

Max touched it and saw the option for the first three floors. Floor four was still off limits due to having been in it two days ago. The fifth floor was now an option. Selecting it, he vanished first.

“That’s not fun looking,” Fowl muttered as he stood with Max, studying the floor while the women finished getting ready. “A fricking sandbox.”

Max nodded and gazed at the sand that was only about ten yards away. The small piece of stone they stood on led to dunes of sand that seemed to be shifting slightly as a warm wind blew over head stretched on for a while. All around them was a massive mountain that enclosed the environment, flat solid rock that provided no perch to stop the sand that ran right up to it. The sun was a third of the way into the sky, and the heat of it already caused the sand to give off a glassy reflection.

Off in the middle, miles away, was another set of rocks, not as tall as the half-mile-high section around the tower floor.

“It would appear that is the main place to go,” Max said as he pointed. “How bad is traveling in this sand going to be?”

“Horrible,” Cordellia answered from behind. “You two are going to struggle in your armor. The sand will slow down most.”

“Any idea what kind of creatures we might find?”

Cordellia moved up next to Fowl, adjusting her bow a few times, and shook her head. “It could be anything. Just because it’s sand doesn’t mean the monsters here are from a desert. Someone mentioned in a report finding fire elementals once in a dessert. Those things melted the sand as they moved across it.”

“I guess we’ll go ahead and see what we can find. Fowl you stay with them, I’ll scout ahead.”

The dwarf nodded, and both men immediately regretted putting their armor on as the sun beat down on the metal, causing it to heat up quickly.

Standing at the top of a sand dune, Max saw a pack of lizards slowly moving along the sand off to their left a bit away. To their right was a pair of scorpions that were at least as tall as he was.

Motioning for the others to join him, Max pointed at the pack of five lizards, each at least eight feet long, covered with spikes and barbed tails.

“We got lizards or scorpions. Take your pick?”

Batrire cleared her throat, and everyone except Cordellia didn’t look at her.

“Is something wrong with scorpions?”

Their healer nodded at Cordellia, frowning at that question. “I almost died to one. I can’t say I want to dance with one anytime soon.”

“Lizards then?” Fowl asked, pointing at the pack.

“That sounds good. It's a typical fight: pull, root, ice. I’ll root the third, and we can each deal with one while Cordellia and Tanila take care of the rooted ones.”

Fowl grunted and started making his way down the sand dune, doing his best to stay upright as he slid down, his legs sinking past his ankles as he descended.

Both men were sweating as they killed the last lizard. The creatures had been fast, moving on top of the sand with ease.

Max had still easily out-maneuvered and powered the lizard he fought while Fowl tanked and bludgeoned his lizard to death. The women had killed the two that were ensnared, and as the ice prison melted, Max made short work of the last one.

“Not too bad,” Fowl said cautiously.

Nodding, Max turned and made sure everyone was ready before starting to move up another dune to see what was ahead.

“It looks clear!” he shouted from the top of the dune as the others joined him.

“That’s bad,” Tanila groaned. “Too much open space.”

“Maybe they patrol?” Fowl asked, holding his shield over his head for a break from the sun.

“Doesn’t matter, Max replied. “We need to move forward, so I’ll go first. Give me twenty yards and then follow.”

Max’s eyes constantly ran along the sand, wondering what might be on the other side of a dune as he led the way.

“ON ME!”

Spinning around, Max saw three shapes rising from the sand, moving toward Cordellia, who was quickly running away.

“Golems!”

Fowl moved to the creatures that were almost fully formed, massive nine-foot-tall creatures of sand, and slammed his hammer into it. A pile of sand flew out but was quickly replaced by more sand as it swung at Fowl.

A dust storm erupted from where the fist of sand connected against Fowl’s shield. Max knew from the sound that if Fowl didn’t have the ability his new chest piece provided, his dwarven friend would be tumbling across the sand.

“Fire or Ice?” Tanila shouted as she created a spear of ice and sent it at the golem on Fowl’s right.

It pierced the golem's head, slowly moving through the sand before exiting the other side. A hole was there for a moment, but as before, more sand came from its body and filled it again.

Finally arriving at the battle, Max was grateful that Fowl had gotten the chest piece. He watched their dwarven warrior absorb the blows of the golems that came at him.

“How do we kill them?” Tanila called out.

Max started hacking at the creature, his weapon cleaving off an arm of the left golem before it began to rejoin again.

“Gods!” Fowl muttered, spitting out sand from his mouth. “I can’t do anything to them!”

Ignoring the shouts of frustration, Max continued assaulting the golem, cleaving off a limb, smashing the head to dust, and leaving massive gouges missing from the creature. Every strike seemed futile as it only took a few seconds for sand to begin to repair the lost section.

What do we need to do?

186 - Overcoming Fear[186 - Overcoming Fear - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES[https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/89317/license-to-cultivate]

Max and Fowl didn’t stop their attacks, trying to ignore the fatigue of having been on the offensive side for over thirty seconds.

His flame nova had done nothing besides melt some of the sand for a moment, not even earning a roar or extra attention from the three golems that continued to pound on Fowl.

At least his aura is holding their attention.

Moving behind the golems, Max cut off a leg near the hip, watching the same one he had been fighting for a while stumble into the sand. As a new leg began to form, he repeated the process, hoping to find something to keep these things down.

Fowl took a few steps back, trying to get into a better position on the sand so he wasn’t at an angle on the dune.

Casting frost nova, Max watched as a small bit of ice formed on the ice before melting under the sun. The creature on the ground, rebuilding its feet, slowed for a moment. Slamming his halberd down into the golem's head again, Max’s sonar informed him of something small that had shifted inside the golem with that attack.

Inside the creature, something was moving around, never staying in one spot of its chest. He could barely sense it, but it was there.

Closing his eyes, Max let his sonar guide him, waiting and watching as the object would vanish and then reappear for a moment, closer to the side he was standing on.

Poised and with his feet set, Max held his weapon ready to thrust.

When the object inside the golem showed up on his sonar, Max thrust immediately, trusting his skill and weapon expertise to direct his strike.

The tip of his halberd pierced through the sand and hit the tiny one-inch object, shattering it.

Immediately, the golem started to dissolve, and Max let himself smile.

“They have a core! It moves around!” Max shouted, quickly stepping to the side where the middle golem was still hammering on Fowl.

Another thrust later turned the second golem into a pile of dust, and twenty seconds later, the third golem was down.

“That was like a kick in the nuts,” Fowl complained. “Those things lingered for days!”

“How could you see those?” Cordellia asked as they stood together at the top of the dune, finding a broken core and two yellow gems.

“They moved, and you can almost make it out for a moment,” Max lied. “Thankfully, I’m pretty good with poking the right spot.”

Those words left his mouth before Max realized it, and Fowl erupted into laughter, causing Max to wish his helmet was visible so that his red cheeks weren’t evident.

“I’ll stop asking questions now,” Cordellia declared, shaking her head at how Max’s comment.

Fowl took a moment to catch his breath, still chuckling as they began moving toward the stone area they believed the boss was at.

Two more packs of lizards and another set of golems were taken down. Max and the others took a break, drinking water and splashing a little on themselves. Tanila and Max had combined their stone walls to create a small amount of shade as they rested, getting a small reprieve from the heat that continued to scorch the tower floor.

Scouting ahead, Max gazed down another dune, not seeing anything and wondering if another group of golems would appear soon.

As he started to walk, the sand and ground began to shift, and Max paused.

“Wait!”

The rest of the group stopped their approach, and Max scanned the area with his eyes and sonar. Nothing moved, and no golems came, so he took a few more steps and felt the sand vibrate again slightly.

From the front, coming over the dune, something traveled inside the sand right at him. It was at least four feet wide, moving with a speed he couldn’t believe. The creature didn’t let the sand slow it down, instead barreling through it.

Max tried to move and dodge, but every step he took only caused the creature to turn toward him.

It’s got a damn ability to track me!

“Something in the sand! It can follow as you move!”

The creature finally reached the edge of Max’s sonar ability, and his eyes went wide. It was six feet across, and its body length continued to increase as it rushed at Max. A huge open mouth with teeth all around the inside, sand pouring into it, did not slow down its approach.

Planting his feet, Max prepared, unsure what the creature would do for an attack.

At three yards, the creature emerged from the sand and launched itself at Max. Purple, hard-scaled skin covered the worm, which he finally saw.

Waiting until the last second, Max’s air wall appeared right before the worm's open mouth. It slammed into it, and its mouth widened. The worm's teeth slid over it as they bent back into its throat.

It’s going to eat my air wall!

Stepping to the side, Max swung with his weapon, hacking into the side of the worm. It made a cut, but nothing that was going to stop the monster. It began to thrash, pressing harder to swallow the air wall so it could be free and back into the sand and

Using his stone wall, Max put it at the base of the ground and the air wall, trying to slow down the worm more as he continued to hack at the exposed side.

The others were running up the dune as fast as they could, and Max saw a giant boulder slam into the exposed creature's top part, shattering the hardened natural armor.

“Keep it pinned!”

Tanila’s stone wall appeared behind his, reinforcing it as Max continued to pound on the creature's side. Fowl was now up next to it, slamming his hammer over and over into the wurm and causing it to thrash from the pain of his weapon’s effect.

Cordellia managed to get a few arrows into the area between the damaged pieces, helping to increase the flow of purple blood that was beginning to stain the sand beneath it.

Max finally shattered the layer of armor, and his weapon was now cleaving through the flesh. It took them almost a minute, with Tanila quickly recasting her airwall inside the creature’s open mouth as Max’s spell expired. Soon, the top half of the worm was removed, a solid section five feet long.

[4 Strength Consumed]

[4 Constitution Consumed]

Max let out a small sigh as the cold rushed over him, relieving the heat from the sun and the sweat of fighting for so long.

“What in the gods is that?” Fowl asked, wiping the purple blood off with a rag.

Max stared at the corpse and the section of the body that was still in the sand, buried underneath, and had no idea how far it went on.

“Smart thinking with the air wall,” Tanila said, moving up to pick up a few pieces of the creature's body that had fallen off and store them. I guess it’s a good thing it couldn’t swallow it all.”

Max nodded and kept a straight face as Fowl snickered.

“Ogre nuts, you are so twenty-five,” Batrire informed Fowl. “Must you take everything wrong?”

“Don’t blame me!” Fowl replied, pointing at Cordellia. “Look at her face! Even she turned red from that comment!”

Cordellia's cheeks had been red, but now they were almost as red as an apple.

Tanila’s face blushed slightly, but Max just smiled and turned toward the stone walls they were moving toward.

“We’re maybe halfway there if we’re lucky. Hard to tell with how the sand seems to shimmer. We need to keep going as it doesn’t appear the sun is going to shift, and the longer we stay in it, the worse we’re going to feel.”

Grunts came, and everyone got into formation. Max set off ahead, scouting while the other four stayed together.

It had taken hours to reach the outer edge of the stone wall. The sand came completely up to it, and there was no opening on the side they were on.

“It’s at least a hundred yards high,” Tanila said. “Thoughts?”

“We can walk around and look for the entrance, or I can try out my cloak ability, which I haven’t tested yet,” Max replied.

“Oh shite!” Fowl exclaimed, beaming like the hot sun above them. “You can climb like a spider!”

“What?!”

Max turned and nodded at Cordellia, who was shaking her head in disbelief.

“I haven’t tried it yet, but I guess now is better than never, right?”

“Unless ya fall,” Batrire stated. “I mean, maybe you could survive.”

Chuckling, Max ignored Tanila’s concerned expression and held out a hand for Fowl to high-five.

“I’ll see what I can find. If I fall, be ready to summon a few walls. It's better to crash into them part of the way than the whole way.”

[Spider Walk]

After activating his cloak's skill, Max reached out with his hand and felt it grip. He tugged at it, and it let go immediately. Wondering what kept it from sticking or not sticking, Max used both hands and pulled upward, thinking about his right one, which came free.

“Doesn’t seem too bad,” Max said as he started climbing the stone wall.

After a few first moments over the first twenty feet, Max figured out how to move quickly, one hand moving while the other three points stayed in contact. Once he had the pattern, his feet, and hands moved like he had been a wall climber his whole life.

Reaching the top had been faster than he had expected, knowing he had at least three minutes left before it expired. Pulling himself up, Max gazed at the mountain wall and saw the cliffs were at least fifty feet thick. Off to the right-left, he could see a slight opening in the wall. It didn’t appear to be very wide. Across the mile-wide bowl he could see sand filling it all.

Whatever is inside there isn’t going to be fun.

Standing before the entrance to the bowl of sand Max had found, the five of them gazed through the opening. Stone ran along the pathway. The only stone they could walk on in the entire tower floor so far besides the entrance.

“We ready?” Max asked. “No idea what’s inside.”

Tanila nodded, and everyone else grunted slightly.

They walked in a line, trying to ignore the sensation of walls that seemed to press in upon them. Max was in the front with Fowl in the back as they tried to focus on what might be ahead.

“We can always go back?” Fowl asked Cordellia quietly.

“I hope so,” she whispered.

Max ignored the questions and knew his own heart was everyone else’s, beating faster than he could believe at the unknown.

He came to an edge and glanced down, seeing that the spot they were on was twenty feet up. Below them was a drop into a pile of sand that appeared designed to help soften their landing. A hundred yards away and every hundred yards, it appeared was a small area of stone, just a few feet off the ground. The small pieces of stone couldn’t be any more than ten feet wide, but they ran in a circle along the entire boss area.

Kneeling, he gazed out at the massive opening, studying it for any clues that might be present on what kind of boss they would fight.

“Kinda seems the gods are not going to make getting out easy,” Fowl muttered. “That’s a bit of a drop.”

Nodding, Max’s eyes never left the sand.

“What do you think it is?” Tanila asked, and Max could sense the trepidation in her voice.

“Our first test,” Max replied, motioning to the ground below. Glancing over his shoulder, he looked at each of them in turn. “Are we going to attempt it or turn back?”

The other four exchanged glances with each other, each staring at the decision that required them to take a leap of faith.

“Is it wrong if I said I was scared?” Cordellia asked.

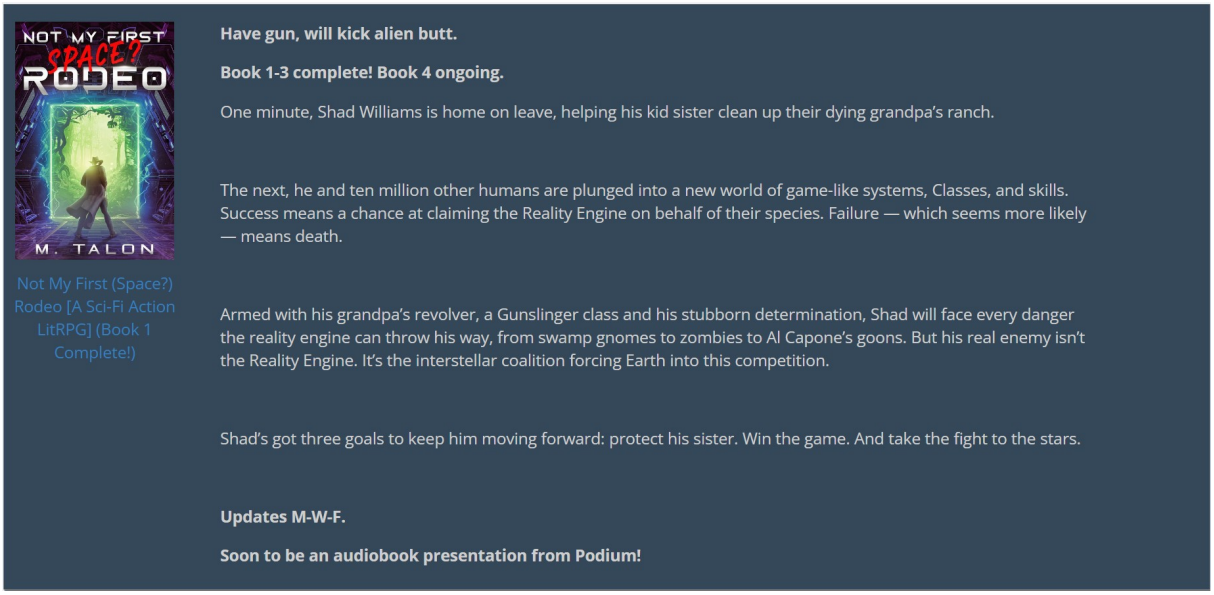
Max shook his head and smiled. “So am I.”

187 - Willing To Risk Everything

187 - Willing To Risk Everything - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

[IMG_LINKhttps://www.royalroad.com/fiction/75195/not-my-first-space-rodeo


NOT MY FIRST SPACE? RODEO
M. TALON
Not My First (Space?) Rodeo [A Sci-Fi Action LitRPG] (Book 1 Complete!)
Have gun, will kick alien butt.
Book 1-3 complete! Book 4 ongoing.
One minute, Shad Williams is home on leave, helping his kid sister clean up their dying grandpa's ranch.
The next, he and ten million other humans are plunged into a new world of game-like systems, Classes, and skills. Success means a chance at claiming the Reality Engine on behalf of their species. Failure — which seems more likely — means death.
Armed with his grandpa's revolver, a Gunslinger class and his stubborn determination, Shad will face every danger the reality engine can throw his way, from swamp gnomes to zombies to Al Capone's goons. But his real enemy isn't the Reality Engine. It's the interstellar coalition forcing Earth into this competition.
Shad's got three goals to keep him moving forward: protect his sister. Win the game. And take the fight to the stars.
Updates M-W-F.
Soon to be an audiobook presentation from Podium!

//

Max caught Batrire and Fowl as they fell, ignoring the grunts, and did his best to be brave.

“Are you certain you are ok with this decision?” Max asked as they waited for Cordellia to commit to this moment.

The archer didn’t reply but just nodded. She knew this was one of those moments where if they turned and left, she might be done. The archer trembled as she waited to drop down into Max’s open arms.

“If we don’t do this, we’ll always quit, hoping for the perfect matchup. That’s not how we are, and you know it.”

Nodding his head once, Max motioned to the stone platform. “We’ll go there. Part of me hopes this is a sand golem, but the other part of me knows I’m wrong.”

He had asked his skill for advice, but nothing was said, not even laughter. Part of that scared Max even more.

***

As they got halfway toward the stone platform they were angling toward, Max felt the sand shifting and knew it had to be another worm.

“GO!” he shouted, pointing at the platform and racing ahead and away from it.

“Seth?!” Tanila called out.

“GO!” he replied, ignoring her.

The four raced toward the stone platform while Max tried to distract the creature that was moving a lot more sand than the other worm they had faced. Judging by the sand being displaced, Max knew it was at least twice as wide, if not more.

It was coming toward him, speeding along the flat tan sand like an arrow aimed at where he was going. It had hesitated momentarily when the other four ran, but Max pulled out his halberd and dragged it behind him in the sand, doing everything he could to attract its attention.

I'm like bait for a fish…

Part of him wanted to activate his haste, but without knowing the full scale of what they were going to be going up against, Max waited, not wanting to use any skills if he didn't have to.

It was a race to a stone platform, and Max felt he had a slight edge on the worm, his dexterity being what allowed him to move faster than he had ever imagined.

The yards vanished as he covered the two hundred of them, knowing his friends were safe, and jumped onto the stone, seeing the worm coming at him start to slow down the moment he vanished from the sand.

No longer did it come right at him. Instead, it began to slow down and turn, the telltale movement vanishing as it did.

He could see the others watching him and knew they were anxiously waiting to hear what to do. No plan had really been laid out as the only idea besides finding out what kind of boss they were facing and reaching what they knew had to be a small safe spot.

Standing there, all alone, feeling the gazes of his friends a hundred yards away, Max knew what he wanted to do.

Pulling out one of the clubs he had kept in the troll dungeon, Max tied a rope around it, making sure the knot was secure. Getting more of the rope designed for snow dungeons had been one of the best decisions of his life.

Spinning a few times as he let go, launching the club well over three hundred yards off into the middle of the sand.

Without waiting, he grabbed the rope, glad the pouch he wore fed it continuously. Hand over hand, Max began to drag it toward him, sometimes jerking it, other times pulling it slowly, and occasionally stopping.

Soon, what he hoped for happened. The sand began to shift and shake, and the boss appeared at the top of the sand, making its way toward the club. It was still hidden; only a tiny bit could be seen from the cloud it sent up as it moved, yet Max didn't care about that. Right now, he wanted to see the boss more than anything.

As the boss raced toward the club he had tossed, moving away from Max, he sprinted toward the others, running along the sand and pulling the club as he moved.

Always keeping an eye on the spot as the club drug through the sand, Max was almost to the stone platform when the boss showed itself, rising from the sand and letting the club slide down its throat.

At least sixteen feet across, most likely more, Max saw the boss in its full glory and cut off the rope fed to his pouch. He made the last few yards in a couple of steps and jumped onto the rock platform to join his friends.

“Did you see that?!” Fowl asked.

“We all did,” Batrire replied. “The real question is, what are we going to do about fighting it?”

Max ignored both of those questions, his eyes focused on Cordellia, who was unable to stop the tremors plaguing her. Moving slowly, he got to where she was and reached up, putting a hand on her shoulder.

“We’ll be fine. Just breathe,” Max said softly.

Her breathing was rapid, and after Max repeated himself again, she forced herself to take a deep breath and let it out. After a few more, she started to relax and gave him a nod.

“We’ll be fine. We always manage, but I’m going to need you to give me ideas. Think like an archer or someone else, but come up with what might work.”

Turning back to the others, Max could see all of them were anxious.

“Can we use our walls of air?” Tanila asked, already believing it wasn’t going to work.” I mean, we’d have to get them perfectly placed, and I’m not sure, even if we did, they would hold.”

Max nodded, watching as the sand returned to its unmoving place, the worm obviously deep enough that they couldn’t track its movements.

“Wish we had some bombs or explosives,” Fowl muttered. “Then we could feed them to it.”

“Where are we going to get explosives from?” Batrire asked, giving her dwarven lover a glare.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Max said. “We don’t have those, but we do have fireballs. Maybe if we can cast them while its mouth is open, they will do damage.”

“It’s a shame you can’t get on top of it and attack from up there,” Cordellia said quietly as she peered across the sand.

“That’s not a bad idea. Is there any way to make that happen?” Max asked as he glanced at Cordellia, who seemed surprised that he had actually heard her.

“Uh… not really,” she stuttered. “I mean, do the worms go back into the ground when they attack? Once they show themselves, we have always pinned them in. Can one of these platforms do that?”

Tanila was tapping her chin and looking at the other stone platforms on either side of them. While everyone but Max and Cordellia took ten to fifteen seconds to get across one hundred yards, only Max might be faster than the boss.

“Do you think these stone things can actually stop that thing? I mean, we’re packed onto this, and I’m not certain how thick the stone is. It might just be a rock sitting on the sand, or it could be a long column.”

Max grinned and moved to the side closest to the wall of the bowl. Using his weapon, he shoved the haft down and along the edge. Eventually, his blade was about to be buried when he stored it and stood back up.

“It’s at least eight feet long, maybe more. Which is good to know,” Max stated. “The worst part is that even if this is a ten by ten-foot rock, we’re looking at something that would still fit within the boss’s mouth. Maybe if we added the stone walls, we could make it wide enough for a moment, but then what?”

“Could we shoot fire then?” Fowl asked.

“That would require us standing on this thing while it tries to eat us!” Batrire exclaimed, narrowing her eyes at Fowl and glaring.

“You’re both right,” Max said. “Attacking the boss from the outside might be impossible, even if I was on top of it. Maybe I could damage it with everything, but if not, then what. The injury I’d create wouldn’t be that impressive.”

Tanila was tsking her tongue, considering everything the party could do.

“How bad do we want this kill?” Tanila asked.

Everyone gave Tanila their attention.

“More than anything,” Cordellia said quietly but firmly. “If we give up… I’m not sure I can do this again.”

Max nodded, and soon the other two agreed.

“Ok, this sounds like a stupid idea, but I think this might work.”

Max pulled on the rope, watching as the boss raced toward them on the platform.

His heart was pounding, and everyone felt the moment when Tanila’s plan would either work or they would all die.

The boss came full bore and locked onto the dancing club, and Max continued to give sharp tugs with the rope. It was only about ten yards away, and if they timed this right, the only chance they had came from this moment.

“Ten seconds! Be ready to cast!”

Tanila took control, and no one said a word. Everything depended on their working as a team, and that meant no mistakes.

Max and Tanila both began summoning their fireballs, letting them grow and burn as hot as possible, stuffing every ounce of mana the spell would allow them to pour into it before they would have to unleash it.

The boss lunged up from the sand at the weapon and the pillar as Max yanked the club once more, bringing it just a few yards from where they were.

Its massive maw opened up, revealing at least a thousand teeth or more all surrounding the inner lining that led to its stomach.

As it approached the five of them standing on the platform, time almost slowing down, Tanila shouted, “NOW!”

Max and her both let their fireballs go, watching as the two spells raced down the boss’s dark gullet. It fell upon them, about to swallow them and the rock whole, when Batrire activated her shield.

A shimmering ball of protection immediately sprang up around them, catching the boss as its sides were about to pass along the top half of the stone platform.

Everything shook as the boss’s momentum came to a halt. Like a fish that had swallowed something that suddenly expanded, it was stuck, unable to swallow the shielded group or the large piece of rock it had its mouth around.

Max didn’t hesitate. His Fire Nova was already preparing to be cast. He had created an air wall in the middle section of the ten yards of teeth. Running forward and dashing out of Batrire’s protective shield, he leaped off the stone pillar, crossing the space over the two-foot-long teeth, and planted his foot on the air wall, propelling himself past the dangerous teeth that dripped with green ooze.

His fire spell went off, sending waves of fire traveling down the creature's already burnt flesh. It pulsated from pain, and a howl of air came at him, but it couldn’t do anything, blocked by the shield their healer had gained from those blessed elixirs.

As his feet prepared to touch down on the flesh of the beast, Max let himself go, his weapon poised for his first attack.

[Regeneration]

[Rampage]

[Power Strike]

[Armored Warrior]

[Magical Strike]

[Berserker]

There was no time for his eyes to adjust to the red hue that normally came. Max didn’t notice the massive ice spear that flew past him, impaling itself into the creature's already damaged insides. The arrows that had exploded before he plunged head first into certain death for most had helped to weaken the part of the creature that never experienced attacks like this.

His weapon cut through the creature's flesh, sheering the inside until the blade of his weapon cracked the protective outer layer of defenses from the inside.

Max’s weapon didn’t stop, striking two more times in the same moment, rendering flesh from the boss’s throat.

It tried to lift itself up, wanting to break free, but the orb was unmoving. Batrire was held tightly by Fowl, his ability keeping her in place and the protective barrier firmly wedged in the boss's maw.

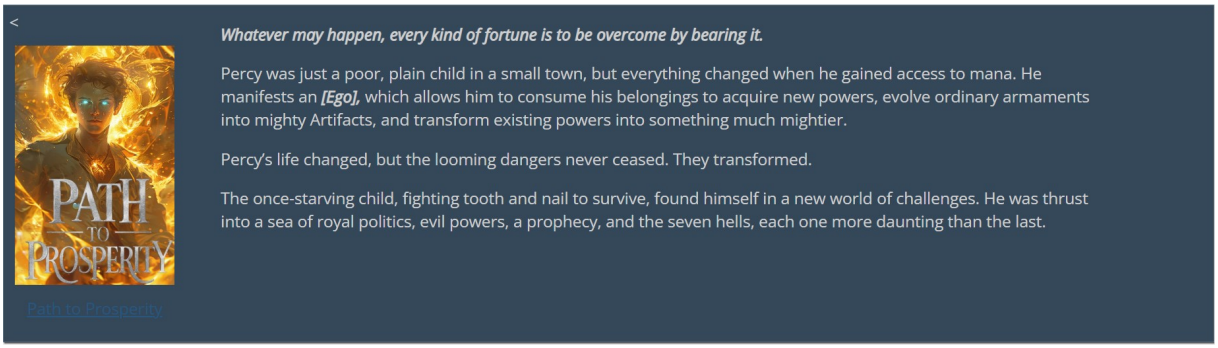
Max moved deeper inside the creature, not able to control himself, not willing to allow the decrease in damage to take place. Flesh tried to press against him, to squeeze and crush him, but his defense and strength held, slashing and cutting off swathes of flesh as his weapon was like a tornado made of blades, cutting the inside of the creature to pieces.

At that moment, Max felt pain, even through the red rage of the berserker's skill.

We're in acid!

188 - Melting Flesh[188 - Melting Flesh - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


Whatever may happen, every kind of fortune is to be overcome by bearing it.
Percy was just a poor, plain child in a small town, but everything changed when he gained access to mana. He manifests an [Ego], which allows him to consume his belongings to acquire new powers, evolve ordinary armaments into mighty Artifacts, and transform existing powers into something much mightier.
Percy's life changed, but the looming dangers never ceased. They transformed.
The once-starving child, fighting tooth and nail to survive, found himself in a new world of challenges. He was thrust into a sea of royal politics, evil powers, a prophecy, and the seven hells, each one more daunting than the last.
PATH TO PROSPERITY
Path to Prosperity

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/89323/path-to-prosperity/chapter/1697652/b1-chapter-1-worst-morning-ever

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The voice told him it was bad, yet Max's mind didn't want to give in. The pain was excruciating, and for a few more seconds, his berserker buff and armored warrior would run out. He knew the plan, and he had to trust Batrire and his regeneration.

You fool!

The voice was so distant. It was barely there, lost in the fury of battle as Max continued to cut a line of destruction inside the boss. Its own acid was beginning to break down its flesh. The lining that normally kept it safe was gone. Instead, its own body beneath the thick, rubbery skin was cut almost to its outer protective shell.

A few seconds ticked by, and Max's mind knew the moment was coming when pain would overwhelm him. With one last slash of his weapon, Max focused and cast a spell, fighting the rage that wanted him to give in.

[Demonic Teleportation]

The world shifted, and Max was outside on the sand. Pain wracked his body, and he felt himself struggling to move. Pulling a potion from his storage, Max could sense the skin under his armor was gone. His sonar revealed the horrible truth. His regeneration was struggling to keep flesh on his bones.

With no time to waste, Max slammed the potion into his mouth. There was no tongue to cut, no lips to worry about. His face was like a skeleton; barely any muscles were still attached.

Liquid rolled down the almost-gone tube that led to his stomach.

Max felt the power of the potion kick in and hit points that had been steadily plummeting went back up. His mind was racing, and he felt his flesh fighting against an acid that was still there.

Get naked! Fall to the sand and roll around! Wash yourself with water!

The voice was right. He willed his entire outfit into his storage, unable to think about his friends and what they were doing or how the fight was going. His life was on the line, and there wasn't a moment to lose.

Naked, he fell on the sand, writhing around it, letting the rough pieces absorb part of the green goo.

It was then that Max realized he was blind once more. His eyeballs were melting, fighting back through the pain of it all.

Time seemed to stretch on as he fought to make a ball of water, knowing that his mastery must have some sort of that. Ice and water were similar… they had to be. Nothing came, so he formed an ice spear, struggling with the magic as his body writhed in pain.

With it summoned, he held his arms around it, wrapping his legs as best as he could, ignoring the pain that assaulted every sense that he had.

Max created a ball of fire and held it over the ice, feeling it start to melt. The water ran along his arms and body, bringing a sense of relief Max had never known was possible. Slowly, as the water ran down, the acid's strength was reduced, and his regeneration was able to keep up with the damage the acid was causing.

What felt like an eternity was less than a minute as the heat of his fireball melted the ice spear he had been holding.

Warmth and healing washed over him, and Max felt his eyes and ears finally growing back together. For a brief moment, the ability to use his sonar had been gone as the acid had eaten away the part inside his ear responsible for it.

"SETH!"

He could begin to sense his allies rushing toward him, the fuzzy and weird sensation as his body reformed parts and muscles. Batrire had healed him, helping his hitpoints to go back up while the brunt of the repair to his body came from regeneration.

Agonizing pain continued after the brief moment of bliss when he had been healed ended, and the fact both eyes grew back along with his tongue, and more left him trying to breathe and finding it wasn't any better, the acid having damaged his lungs.

His mind swirled in agony and pain from the noise of their shouting and the steps that they took on the sand. Everything was louder, and it felt like his head was going to explode from the pain inside.

Another heal washed over him, one that Max knew meant the fight was over. His body came together at once, skin starting to cover every inch of his muscles after Batrire used her heal, which was on a twenty-four-hour cooldown.

Gasping for air, Max rolled over, staring at the group who were wincing, faces turned, and a pile of vomit at Fowl's feet.

Standing, Max shook his head, letting his mind clear. He saw Batrire and Cordellia trying to look in every direction but at him. Tanila's face was flushed as she motioned to his midsection.

Max glanced down and finally noticed the warm breeze blowing between his legs.

Carefully, he selected a different outfit, but he was not sure what would happen to his armor or if any of the acid would be on it.

"I guess some things do grow back bigger," Fowl said as he wiped his mouth. "Gods, you are ugly without any hair."

Filling his lungs once more, Max turned and saw the worm they had fought was gone. Turning more, he could see a massive chest far off in the middle of the sand.

"We did it?"

"It seems like a stupid question," Batrire replied, finally returning her gaze upon Max. "But if you're standing naked in a boss zone, I guess you and Fowl have been hanging out too long."

A few chuckles came and Max shrugged.

"What happened?"

"Did you get the kill?" Tanila asked.

Glancing at a notification, Max realized that he had missed everything while his body was dissolving.

[Consume has Successfully Consumed Bonus Stats]

[10 Strength Consumed]

[10 Constitution Consumed]

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Skill does not match beings body type]

[Consume is adjusting skill]

[Consumed has Upgraded Sonar to Epic]

Max realized why it had all been so painful when they first arrived.

“I did,” he nodded slowly.

“How does he know that?” Cordellia asked.

“It's a perk of a skill,” Max replied. “It usually only matters on really big ones.”

The elf frowned and furled her eyes in confusion, but she saw Tanila give her a look and shake her head. Nodding once, Cordellia let it go and immediately smiled.

“Well, I appreciate the job well done and the show you gave, yet you’ll have to forgive me if I point out the obvious,” their archer said gleefully. “There is a massive fricking chest over there because we won!”

As one, everyone began to smile and came together, hugging and clapping, finally able to celebrate that Max had survived.

“Are you okay?” Fowl asked as he gave Max a gentle punch to the stomach. “That looked painful, to say the least.”

Nodding as he squeezed Tanila's waist, who was next to him, Max tried to contain the news he wanted to share, knowing he needed to wait until Cordellia was gone.

“What happened? I mean, after I obviously killed the boss.”

Fowl started to laugh, and Batrire joined in, both of them stroking their beards in unison.

“Well, that’s the weird thing,” Tanila explained. “Whatever you did really upset the boss, and it forgot all about us. The moment the shield broke, it ripped its head up into the sky, thrashing in agony. It took us a moment to find you over the noise it made. It flopped to the ground the opposite way you were and thrashed for maybe half a minute and then just stopped. What did you do?”

Max snorted and grinned. “I gave it a taste of its own acid. I guess the lining of its stomach and body is able to handle the acid inside, but once I cut through and reached the outer shell, the acid must have spread throughout the body, eating itself alive from the inside.

Fowl made a retching sound and stopped, holding a hand over his mouth.

“Sorry… just that image after watching you a moment ago…” Fowl turned, making a few more gagging noises while Batrire sighed.

“He’s able to drink a tavern dry, but he sees one person begin melted alive with acid, and he can’t hold his food,” their healer teased.

After Fowl had regained his composure, the five of them trotted off, excited at what lay inside the chest. It was the same tan color as the sand, the standard size of a raid

chest, and had a massive worm etched around the entire side of it. There, at the bottom of it, were five people also etched into the stone.

“Is that supposed to be us?” Fowl asked, running his fingers over the engraving.

“I doubt it,” Max replied. “If it were, you’d be much smaller.”

Fowl extended a hand and gave Max the middle finger. Max wasn’t paying attention to his dwarf friend; instead, he saw Cordellia standing on the edge of the chest, trembling, knowing she had finally conquered not just the boss but also her fears.

“Why don’t you open it, Cordellia?”

She turned and saw that the four members of her party were smiling at her. Each of them had taken a step back, giving her full access to the chest.

“You’re… you’re sure that’s ok?” She asked, stammering at the thought of getting this honor. “I didn’t do a fraction of what you all did.”

Max moved to where their archer was standing, he put a hand on her arm and squeezed. “You did more than you know. We could tell you were afraid, and yet you pushed through it. Every part of you wanted to run and try again, but you didn’t give in to that fear. You stood on a stone platform with us, facing down the largest foe any of us would face, and didn’t flinch. Our plan succeeded because each of us believed in the other and did our part. So don’t downplay your part. You deserve this just as much as the rest of us.”

A single tear escaped the archer’s right eye, and she nodded, wiping it away quickly with her hand.

“Thank you… more than you’ll ever know.”

Nodding once, Max backed up and gave Cordellia the space she would need.

Taking a deep breath, the archer put her hands on the massive lid and thrust it open, thankful that the act of lifting it didn’t require any real strength.

As the lid moved, everyone stepped close, excited to see what lay inside.

“Well, I’ll be an ogre’s uncle,” Fowl said with a chuckle. “I guess that only seems fair.”

Max couldn’t help but grin as he saw the items in the chest.

An elixir like the one each of them had received was there, locked for only Cordellia to take. There was also a bracelet for Max and Fowl and a ring for Tanila and Batrire. Four larger gems than usual rested in the chest and two items that continued to shift between robes, plate armor, a leather-like tunic, and a ring chest piece.

“So, who should go first?” Batrire asked, winking at Cordellia.

“Is that… really what I think it is?”

“Yup!” Fowl exclaimed. “Now hurry up and drink it so we can hear what you get!”

Their archer stared in disbelief at the four of them. She could tell from their expressions that none of them were jealous of what she had been given. Legends

and stories abounded about fights that broke out, kingdoms that had warred, and lives ended over one of these elixirs.

Her eyes trembled, tears coming down in streams as she saw that her group was different. They were truly a family; apparently, she was part of it.

After taking a few deep breaths and steadying her hands, Cordellia took the elixir out and held it in her hands. A few seconds passed as she gazed upon its beauty and felt the warmth inside.

“Bottoms up, I guess,” their archer said as he took the top off and swallowed it all in one big gulp.

Everyone held their breath as her body became rigid, her arms and legs straight, and a beam of light shot from her mouth.

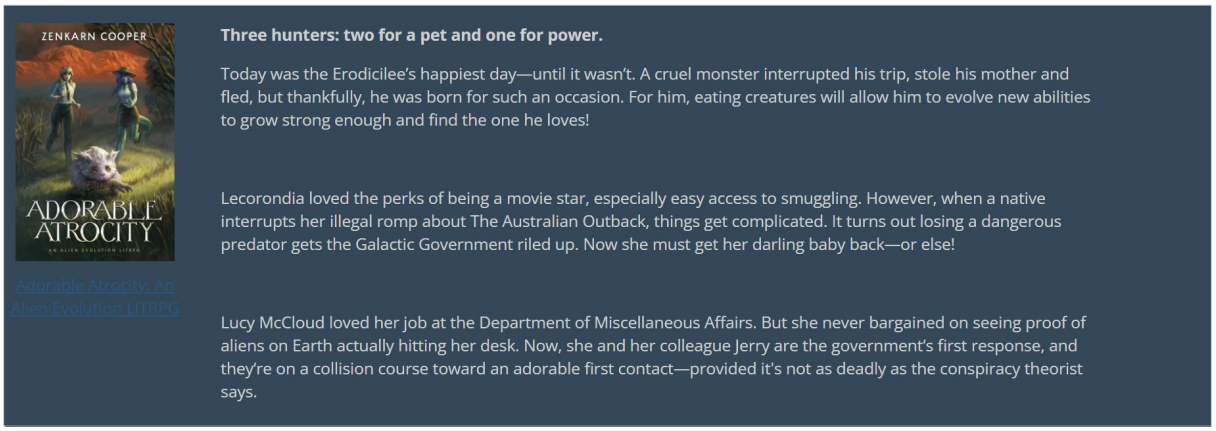
Cordellia’s mouth never closed, her eyes trembling as she recovered from the ordeal.

“So what did you get?” Tanila ask.

189 - Rewards For Winning[189 - Rewards For Winning - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://geni.us/adorb


ZENKARN COOPER
ADORABLE ATROCITY
Three hunters: two for a pet and one for power.
Today was the Erodicilee’s happiest day—until it wasn’t. A cruel monster interrupted his trip, stole his mother and fled, but thankfully, he was born for such an occasion. For him, eating creatures will allow him to evolve new abilities to grow strong enough and find the one he loves!
Lecorondia loved the perks of being a movie star, especially easy access to smuggling. However, when a native interrupts her illegal romp about The Australian Outback, things get complicated. It turns out losing a dangerous predator gets the Galactic Government riled up. Now she must get her darling baby back—or else!
Lucy McCloud loved her job at the Department of Miscellaneous Affairs. But she never bargained on seeing proof of aliens on Earth actually hitting her desk. Now, she and her colleague Jerry are the government’s first response, and they’re on a collision course toward an adorable first contact—provided it's not as deadly as the conspiracy theorist says.
Adorable Atrocity: An Alien Evolution LitRPG

“I… I got two skills…” Cordellia whispered. “Two skills… both rare grade.”

Fowl let out a *whoop* and held out a hand for a high five.

Max leaned over and took care of him since their archer was still in amazement and unable to process what had just happened.

“What skills are they, dear?” Batrire asked, moving up next to their newest member and gently squeezing her arm.

Glancing down at Batrire, Cordellia nodded slowly. “I got Elemental Shot and Poison Arrow.”

“Those are really good!” Tanila exclaimed. “Congrats Cordellia!”

The elf nodded and turned, staring at the group again and shaking her head slowly.

“Why? I mean, I think I know why, but why? Each of you knows what one of those is worth. You could have easily–”

“Killed you? Taken it? Forced you to hand it over?” Max asked, interrupting Cordellia.

“Yes! Why would you let me have it?”

Batrire squeezed the confused archer’s arm again and laughed. “You know the answer, yet I think you’re too afraid to say it, so I will. You’re part of our family. You are new to all this, but we don’t care. Seth said it already. Without you, we probably would have turned tail and ran.”

Cordellia nodded and tried to let go of the doubt in her heart. Max could tell that somewhere inside, she kept a story hidden. Each of them had one.

“How about this?” Max asked. “From now on, if you feel you’re not worthy of an item, we’ll discuss it as a group, and if we vote that you are, you can’t complain when we make you take it.”

Chuckles rang out from the group, and Cordellia smiled and bobbed her head.

“Okay, now it’s time for the rest of us!” Fowl stated loudly as he moved to the chest and reached in, grabbing the bracelet that was meant for him.

He pulled back a very thin tan bracelet, less than a quarter inch wide and maybe that in thickness. A worm was etched around it, just like the one they had just fought. The detail was amazing, even with the tiny amount of space given for it.

“Holy goblin nuts,” Fowl muttered as he slipped it on.

“Going to share those stats?” Batrire asked as Fowl started to smile.

“Maybe later,” he replied, winking at her. “Now, take your item and see if you want to share first.”

Huffing, Batrire frowned and reached over the edge, pulling back her hand with a tan ring, matching Fowls in size and design. Slipping it onto her finger, it adjusted, her eyes widened, and she started to laugh.

“Seriously,” Tanila said immediately. “I want to know what I’m missing!”

Batrire motioned to the chest with her head. “Find out.”

Max and Cordellia watched as Tanila mimicked Batrire almost exactly. The moment Tanila slipped the ring on her finger, Max was certain her face would break from how big her smile was.

“I guess you’ll need to be the one to share,” Cordellia said with a groan. “Are they always like this?”

Max shook his head and reached in, pulling the bracelet out and grinned. “Not often but it has to be good if they are.”

Slipping the bracelet over his wrist, Max felt the power that entered his body.

[Inspect Bracelet]

*****

Ring of the Minor Sand Worm

- 10 Strength, Constitution
- Minor Acid Resistance

Bonded

*****

Max couldn’t help but laugh. Sure, the stats were nice, but the fact that everyone had watched him almost dissolve until nothing but bones remained made him understand what was funny now.

“It’s because I’m guessing each of their items also has a Minor Acid Resistance effect,” Max informed Cordellia, who immediately started chuckling now that she understood the joke.

“Hopefully, that will keep ya from looking like that again,” Fowl teased. “Now then, what are we going to do about the last two items? I don’t need a chest for a while.”

Tanila and Batrire both shook their heads.

“I guess it means you and me,” Max said as he motioned to the chest. “Pick one, and I’ll take the other.”

Cordellia started to open her mouth but stopped when she saw Tanila begin to frown. Instead, she smiled and reached in, tapping one of the changing items before pulling her hand out.

Thirty seconds later, she held a tan-colored piece of leather with extra padding. The padding looked a little like the outside of the wurm's body, yet it was flexible.

“I’m not going to lie, that is ugly as can be, but at least it doesn’t have a massive spike in the shoulder.”

Cordellia frowned as the other four all laughed at Fowl’s comment.

“Back in my days when fashion didn’t matter and all I cared about was stats,” Max said.

“Wait, you care about fashion?” Cordellia asked, rewarded with more laughter from the group.

Max ignored her comment and leaned over, touching the last item before retrieving the larger yellow gems to give to Everett.

When the timer ended, and a piece of tan armor appeared in his hands, Max took a moment to study it.

“Is that what I think it is?” Tanila asked, moving closer to the rest of the group.

The chest faded away, allowing them easier access to Max as he held out the chest piece.

“It is! Those are tiny loops of the worm's protective scales. Quickly tell me what it offers!”

Max laughed as he stored the armor, and it immediately appeared on his chest.

“Ew, that’s ugly,” Fowl declared as he waved his hands.

[Inspect Bracelet]

*****

Ringed Chest of the Sand Worm’s Skin

- 10 Strength, Constitution
- 10% Magic Resist
- 20% Crushing Damage Bonus

Bonded

*****

“Wow… that’s kind of nice. Definitely going to keep that over my old one.”

“What do you usually do with your old gear?” Cordellia asked.

“I’ve donated a lot of it. Actually, I gave away any I could. I found someone who worked with new adventurers and wanted to give them a leg up.”

Their archer glanced at the others, who nodded.

“Wow, now I feel bad for selling my gear.”

“Don’t feel bad,” Tanila said. “He does that, not the rest of us. For some reason, our resident human has a heart two times bigger than anyone else, unlike our dwarf warrior, who has a heart two times too small.”

“Bah, you're all a bunch of meanies,” Fowl protested while pointing at the tower portal that had appeared. “Let’s go home. My whole body is sweating from all the sun I’ve gotten.”

Everyone nodded in agreement, ready to return and rest.

With three days off for all of the cooldowns to reset, Max was already planning on what he was going to do.

“So no one wants to tell me the best way to kill a wurm besides some fishing strategy?” Everett asked, scowling at the group.

The team sat on the couches, smiling as Max demonstrated for the Faction leader once again how to drag items through the sand.

“Once it opens up, blast the inside of its mouth. Use the pillars for distance and just keep repeating. Honestly, though, if you had something explosive, you could probably kill it a lot easier.”

Tom shook his head, chuckling at the thought of seeing that in action. “It’s a smart move, actually, and you know it. Now I’m glad I continued to give Seth all the rope he kept asking for.”

Nodding, Max pointed at the four large gems sitting on the tiny coffee table. “Are boss gems going to always be that size?”

Everett nodded, his scowl gone as his eyes feasted upon the quantity they had brought back. “Usually, it’s only one or two, occasionally a rare three. So you bringing back four is incredible!”

Max tried to not laugh as Tom and Everett took their seats on the couch across from him. The others had all gone to shower and change. Max didn’t want to mention that he felt about as clean as possible, having received new skin all over.

“So you passed your first test,” Tom said, tapping his fingers on the arm of the couch. “How did Cordellia do?”

“She was amazing,” Max replied. “Honestly, I don’t think we could have gotten a better person for our team. She knows her stuff and has held her own. It was because of her that we beat the boss today.”

Leaning forward, Everett studied Max’s face and tried to fight back a frown. “You’re serious. I can tell by your tone and that grin of yours.”

Max nodded and pointed at Tom. “You were right. It was our first real test. Knowing that what was inside that area of rocks could possibly kill us all was the first real gut check. Having Cordellia there made us realize just how scared most tower climbers must be.”

Max pulled out a map he had sketched and was going to give to Everett when he left. Tapping the area where they moved through the mountain and into the bowl, Max frowned.

“Once we dropped in, there wouldn’t be a time to really turn back. Sure, we could make our way out, but it would be hard and dangerous, especially if the boss was chasing us. The real problem was commitment. Tanila and I knew if we quit, Cordellia would break. She was tired of always giving in. You could see she was almost done before it even started. That spurred us on not to give in to that fear.

“Whose to say we would ever find a boss we felt ready for? How many months or years would we grind out, trying to get stronger? That’s the real problem, isn’t it?

Factions only have so many groups that make it so far before they give up. That's why level fifty-one of the tower is the breaking point."

The two older men looked at each other and smiled.

"Is that what Tanila told you?" Tom asked.

"Not specifically, but I see that now. It all makes sense," Max replied. "For the Golden Axe Faction to actually have a tower climbing group that makes it past level fifty-one would be a major milestone. I'm guessing you two are the last group to make it that far."

Tom and Everett's faces betrayed them with the smallest flinches and eye twitches. Max started to laugh and pointed at them as he shook his head.

"My poker face isn't any good anymore, is it?" Everett asked, finally allowing himself to grin. "You're right. We were part of a group that made it to level fifty-one. For a year, we tried to farm there and progress, but the truth is that the monsters and creatures in the tower become exponentially harder after the fiftieth floor."

Everett stood up and moved to his desk. After a minute, he was on his way back, holding the dagger that Max's alter ego, Joshua, had made.

"Do you know what this is?"

"A dagger?"

Tom laughed, and Everett handed it to Max. "Inspect it."

Holding the dagger in his hand, Max made sure to give it an appreciative look.

[*Inspect Weapon*]

*****

Legendary Frost Dagger

- 17 Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence
- 30% Donus Damage From Ice Essence
- 15% Ice Resistance

Bonded

*****

Max whistled, his eyebrows lifting as his head shook slightly.

"Wow… that's so overpowered."

Looking up, Max saw Everett smiling, his hand outstretched, waiting for the dagger.

"Oh, I can't keep this?"

Laughing, Everett shook his head and grinned. “You don't have enough gold or earned enough for something like this. An item like this isn’t common, and we can trade or sell this for more than you realize.”

“So what floor in the tower dropped that?” Max asked, returning the weapon to Everett.

“It’s not from the tower, Seth. That crafter you sent us made this,” Tom replied.

“Holy elf tits,” Max cursed, looking at the two of them, doing his best to win an award for acting. “You’re serious?”

Each of them nodded, and Everett sat down on the couch.

“You really didn’t know?”

Max shook his head, still pretending to be blown away by the news. “He mentioned being able to craft epic items and wanting a place to practice. But legendary… What else can we make?”

Tom laughed and gestured with his finger at the three of them. “We can’t make anything. There are some items the people in our faction could use, and if this is an indication of the quality of the items made, hopefully, we can outfit a few of our members in the coming days and weeks.”

Max sighed and nodded. “One last question. What are the typical stat bonuses given from item drops in the tower?”

Everett’s left eyebrow rose, and the man studied Max’s face intently. “Why do you ask?”

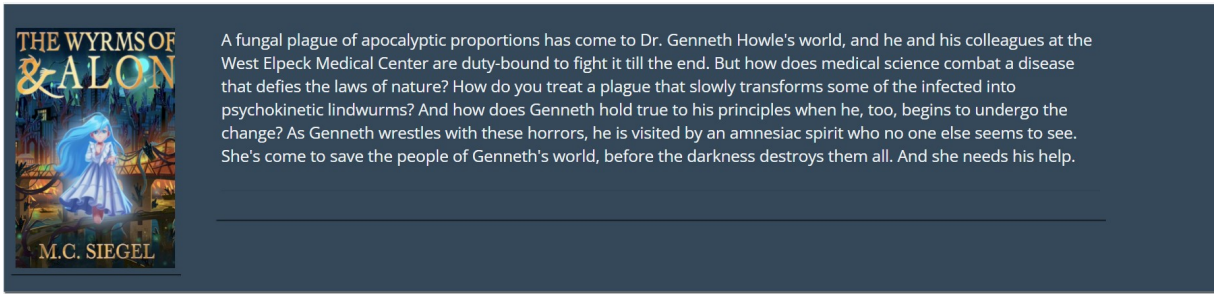
“I’ve got a few items I’d like to see upgraded and want to know what I might hope for.”

Everett turned to Tom and nodded at him.

“Ok, let’s discuss numbers,” his advisor said.

190 - Tower Items Stats190 - Tower Items Stats - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


THE WYRMS OF
&ALON
M.C. SIEGEL
A fungal plague of apocalyptic proportions has come to Dr. Genneth Howle's world, and he and his colleagues at the West Elpeck Medical Center are duty-bound to fight it till the end. But how does medical science combat a disease that defies the laws of nature? How do you treat a plague that slowly transforms some of the infected into psychokinetic lindwurms? And how does Genneth hold true to his principles when he, too, begins to undergo the change? As Genneth wrestles with these horrors, he is visited by an amnesiac spirit who no one else seems to see. She's come to save the people of Genneth's world, before the darkness destroys them all. And she needs his help.

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/64440/the-wyrms-of-alon-hospital-medical-drama-wyrm

Clearing his throat, Tom held up five fingers.

“Tower floor number ten is where you finally move past the max stat points of fifteen per item given. Sometimes, items have all the stat points equal. Other times, they don't. So, seeing a ring with, say, five to strength, dexterity, and constitution before level ten would be a gift from the gods. Understand?”

Max nodded, writing down the information.

“From Floor ten to twenty, it typically goes up to twenty-five total stat points. Again, that means this same ring now has a bonus of seven for those three stats. Levels twenty to thirty play by a different set of rules. Now, items can have up to fifty total stat points and often feature three or four stats, the number of which is shared between them. So you might have a ring that gives ten to three stats or even fifteen to three stats. Likewise, you might have a ring that gives ten or twelve to four different stats.”

Nodding, Max continued to keep his head down, focused on the paper he was writing on and trying not to show his surprise at the stats of the items the tower had been giving them.

“Level thirty to forty plays by a smaller gain, now going from fifty to seventy points. Rules don’t change, though typically, items feature three or four stats. This puts that sword the crafter you sent us at an item in the thirty and forty range. While one might have preferred just three stats, it is still phenomenal on many levels.”

Shifting in his seat, Tom waited until Max stopped writing. When Max looked up and showed he was done, Tom still had one finger standing.

“Tower level forty to fifty start breaking the rules we have come to expect. You can now have a hundred points worth of stats, but you can see the rare item with only two stats sharing that number or all five stats sharing. Imagine two stats with fifty points each in them. That kind of item is a huge gain.”

“And after level fifty?” Max asked as he finished writing down the last few things.

“He never gives up, does he?” Everett asked, chuckling for a moment.

“No, he doesn’t,” Tom replied. “Honestly, the rumors are far-fetched, and the legends of an item after that tower level make it impossible to tell if one is real or not. Some say there are rings with a hundred points in a single stat. Heck, I remember hearing a rumor about someone who had made it into the ninety-second floor and had a weapon with two stats, both at one hundred. All those are good, but nobody believes in them. Besides, we all chase the elusive item with percentage increases. A ring, necklace, bracelet, or even an earring with a five or ten percent bonus to base stats is able to get someone killed.”

“When do those drop?”

Everett and Tom groaned.

“Seth, it's random, but if you see one before the twenty-fifth floor, don’t tell anyone. Not even your own team. Okay?”

Nodding, Max shut his journal and put it into storage.

“Well, if you two are done laughing at me, I need to go shower and then join the rest of my party.”

“One more second,” Everett said, holding his hand out to stop Max as he started to rise. “I need you to listen to me and know that I’m being serious.”

Max sat back down and gave the older man his full attention.

“Don’t rush too fast. Your team is doing things most cannot fathom. Even clearing the first five levels as fast as you have is beyond what most would believe. Hopefully, you five aren’t sharing that knowledge with others because it will get you noticed by a lot of people quickly. The tower is dangerous because it is addictive. A successful raid, one easy floor, and one unprepared moment can cost you your life. You’re going to be sharing the later floors with other groups. It’s not just the monsters and creatures you have to worry about. When one can spend a week or two weeks on a tower floor, it’s not a big deal for some to kill people. They can wait out the flag for fighting. That is why we give out those rings and keep track of where our teams are.”

Everett’s hand suddenly held a large pouch and tossed it to Max.

“Go celebrate with your friends, not too much you get drunk and run your mouths, but go live. Have a life outside the tower. Take it from this old guy and the one sitting next to me. There is more to this world than just leveling up and getting better gear. Ask yourself why you push so much. Let that answer guide you.”

Max nodded as he hefted the coins, feeling their weight before putting the bag into storage.

“Understood. I’ll see what I can do about emptying the casks of a few ale houses.”

Both men laughed and nodded, standing as Max did.

“Enjoy the next few days, have some fun, and take care of your mage,” Tom said, patting Max on the back as he walked toward the door.

“We betting if he listens?” Tom asked after the door shut.

“No… because I want to believe he will, but we both know that their group is focused.”

Nodding, Tom moved to the couch, plopped down, closed his eyes, and rubbed them as he moaned. “What would you give to be in that group?”

Everett didn’t reply, and Tom turned to see the older man staring at the closed door.

“Everett?”

The Faction leader grunted and moved toward the couch. “Nothing. I don’t have balls the size of everyone in that party. Even now, I suspect Cordellia’s are bigger than mine.”

Tom started to howl with laughter, nodding that his old friend was probably right.

The whole group of five celebrated quietly at their old inn, introducing Cordellia to Alexander and enjoying a night of good food, drinks, and fond memories.

Their archer was blown away by how friendly they were with Alexander, but after learning about the assassination attempt on Max and how he had survived it, she understood that, again, this group treated everyone differently than the ones she had always been part of.

After a few hours of food and fun, they made their way back through town, choosing to walk instead of taking a carriage. The streets were active, people moving along the sidewalks, laughing and talking loudly.

It was as if a note had gone out, telling the city that on a random night during the week, people needed to live and celebrate life. Max walked beside Tanila, holding her hand, ignoring the occasional glances he got from an elf or human, surprised to see the two of them like that.

“Does it bother you?” Cordellia asked as they stood on a corner of a street, waiting for a few carriages to pass.

“No, should it?”

Max’s reply caught Cordellia off guard, and she took a moment to consider what her own question must have meant.

“Sorry, I wasn’t trying to imply something was wrong. Just I never noticed how many people seem to have an opinion about that subject.”

Tanila smiled and kissed Max on the cheek, winking at him and showing that she didn’t care either.

“People are always going to have problems with something. I choose to not worry about their opinion. I can let it bog me down, or I can choose to enjoy life with the woman I love.”

Even in the limited light that came mainly from the lamposts all along the streets, Tanila’s face turned red for just a moment.

“You two, stop that mess,” Fowl growled from behind. “I don’t want to hear about how I’m never romantic or proclaim my love in public.”

“We know that’s not true,” Max replied, looking over his shoulder.

His hand reacted faster than the blink of an eye. His shield was up, and the sound of something impacting it echoed on the corner they stood.

“Protect her!”

Max was already moving, running in the direction of the bolt he had sensed in his sonar. Since it had upgraded, it had taken a few hours, but now it was second nature. There was now a fifty-yard bubble around him, constantly flooding his mind with information about the world. He could block out some things like the noises of the

horses and the conversations of people around him that Max didn’t care about. When the bolt entered his area of detection, his body reacted, sensing the danger and moving without him having to think about it.

Tanila had started to rush after him, but Max could sense that Fowl managed to grab a hold of her and keep her from following.

[Demonic Teleport]

When Max touched down on the rooftop on the other side of the street, it made a crunching sound. He ran in a straight line for the spot the shot had come from. A building taller than the rest was ahead, and it had a wider-than-expected area along the top roof. Max wasn’t sure what the building was. It looked like a school of some kind, yet he knew the corner the bolt had been fired from.

Sprinting across the roofs, when he leaped across a street, another bolt came, and Max’s shield once more moved into the path of a bolt.

Someone sure doesn’t want to give up!

Laughter began to come from inside his head, and Max tried to ignore it, knowing now wasn’t the time to have a conversation with his skill.

Movement caught Max’s eye as a figure dropped down from the corner, running away. His eyes tracked the fleeing person, and as he came across the last house, preparing to leap toward the next building across the street, Max almost tripped.

Someone was still hiding at the corner of the building. A faint difference in the aura told him that this person wasn’t just stealthed but had a crossbow and was flagged for attacking someone.

They’re working in pairs…

Realizing that someone was actively still hunting him and choosing to be smarter almost felt good.

I’m worth this much effort…

The cooldown on Demonic Teleportation was almost over and Max slowed to a stop on the building next to the one the person was hiding. He raised his hand like he was staring off at the person who had run away.

A grin formed on Max’s face, and the laughter inside his head came again.

Making a step like he was going to drop to the ground, Max teleported behind the stealthed person, slamming their head into the stone wall they were crouching next to.

The loud crack of stones breaking might have signaled the end of someone’s life or awareness but not for his attacker. They reached out, grabbing at his hands and tried to defend themselves. Excited that there was still fight within his attacker convinced Max to try harder, grabbing their head and yanking it back, bashing their face in with his shield.

A blade appeared in the attacker’s left hand, and Max moved with a speed his opponent either wasn’t prepared for or was too slow from the two blows to their head.

His attacker sneered, and Max could see the features of the elf attacking him. Blocking the attempted strike, Max snapped the man's wrist by holding his wrist hostage and slamming his shield onto it.

The dagger fell to the roof with a clatter against the stones they were fighting on. He howled in pain, and Max didn’t give the elf another chance, repeating the process with his other wrist.

“You messed up,” Max said, growling in the elf’s face as he bashed their head into the shield multiple times until his attacker was unconscious.

Pulling his new favorite rope out, Max quickly bound the elf, withdrawing a blanket and wrapping him inside it as well.

We could kill him… think of the possibilities…

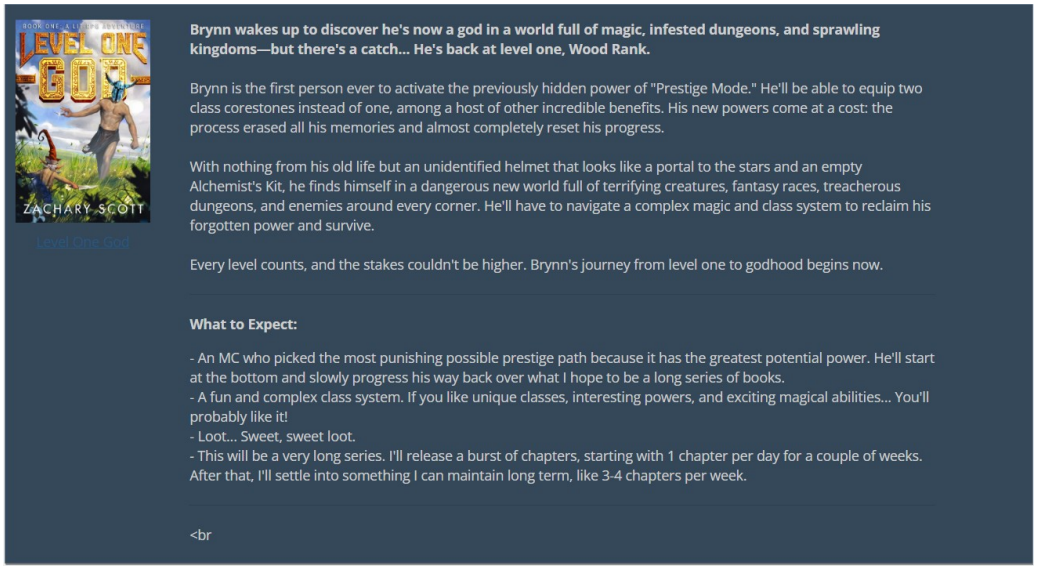
Max laughed, shaking his head as he tied the man up again.

“Don’t worry, his time will come,” Max said out loud.

Together, Max and his skill laughed as he started running along the top of houses at night, headed toward a place where he knew answers might be found.

191 - Fear the Mage[191 - Fear the Mage - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES


LEVEL ONE GOD
ZACHARY SCOTT
Level One God
Brynn wakes up to discover he's now a god in a world full of magic, infested dungeons, and sprawling kingdoms—but there's a catch... He's back at level one, Wood Rank.
Brynn is the first person ever to activate the previously hidden power of "Prestige Mode." He'll be able to equip two class corestones instead of one, among a host of other incredible benefits. His new powers come at a cost: the process erased all his memories and almost completely reset his progress.
With nothing from his old life but an unidentified helmet that looks like a portal to the stars and an empty Alchemist's Kit, he finds himself in a dangerous new world full of terrifying creatures, fantasy races, treacherous dungeons, and enemies around every corner. He'll have to navigate a complex magic and class system to reclaim his forgotten power and survive.
Every level counts, and the stakes couldn't be higher. Brynn's journey from level one to godhood begins now.
What to Expect:
- An MC who picked the most punishing possible prestige path because it has the greatest potential power. He'll start at the bottom and slowly progress his way back over what I hope to be a long series of books.
- A fun and complex class system. If you like unique classes, interesting powers, and exciting magical abilities... You'll probably like it!
- Loot... Sweet, sweet loot.
- This will be a very long series. I'll release a burst of chapters, starting with 1 chapter per day for a couple of weeks. After that, I'll settle into something I can maintain long term, like 3-4 chapters per week.
<br

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/88478/level-one-god

Max stood at the gate, the guards shifting nervously even though they outnumbered him 5 to one.

Without flinching, he held the package still on his shoulder, thankful that two guards had done as he asked. He had sent some to deliver messages to the Faction house and try to find the rest of his party.

“Someone better have a hell of a good reason for waking me up!”

Max couldn’t help but grin as he heard Captain Vella shouting from behind the closed doors to the guard's area.

“Sorry if you all get in trouble,” Max said to the guard on his right.

The poor man was visibly shaking as an awkward smile came from him.

As the large doors swung open and Captain Vella’s eyes met Max’s, the snarl she gave everyone vanished instantly.

“Adventurer Seth… Is that–”

“They are alive. I won’t lie. It took a lot of effort to ensure that, but he may need a healer. Where can we take him?”

Vella’s brief moment of shock vanished, and she started barking orders.

“This way. I know just the place.”

The poor elf was still screaming, and his face looked much worse than it had after a few rounds of Max’s shield.

Captain Vella spit, intentionally hitting the elf in the face.

“How long till you break that seal?” she barked loudly at the two men working on a necklace that held all of the attacker's belongings.

“Maybe another hour? It’s far more complicated than we’ve ever seen.”

Grunting, she turned to Max, who was standing there, arms crossed, his face expressionless.

“Do you want to give it a go? I don’t mind since he was foolish enough to try and kill you?”

Shaking his head, Max studied the elf. Their eyes were filled with hatred, and the chains that bound him continued to look strained as the elf fought to break free.

“I can’t believe they sent a tower climber after me,” Max said. “Taking him down took a lot more than I anticipated.”

“You’re crazy,” the captain said as she shook her head. The fact that you are already in the tower seems impossible. It was almost like the other day when I had to clean up a street filled with blood because of you.”

A knock on the door came.

“Come in!”

Vella’s voice boomed, and a guard entered, handing her a note.

Reading it, the captain’s eyes widened and then handed it to Max.

***

I am outside and ready to do what you cannot. Give me five minutes with them.

Tanila

***

She raised an eyebrow, and Max nodded.

“Five minutes, trust me.”

Hearing the tone of his voice, the captain smiled.

Spinning on her heels, Vella pointed to the two men working on the storage device.

“You two out! Leave that there.”

It took a little bit of effort not to jump when Vella shouted every time, but the people under her had yet to learn that lesson. They were on their feet in an instant and moving for the door as if an animal was about to eat them.

Moving to where the elf was, Vella slugged the man in the stomach. He grunted and then spat blood upon her outfit.

“Good luck. You should have talked while I was here.”

Max and Vella left the elf, whose eyes changed. Hate was almost gone, and worry was starting to creep in.

“You’re certain you will be fine with him?” Vella asked Tanila. “I don’t like leaving you in there by yourself.”

Tanila nodded and motioned to Max, who was leaning against the wall by the door.

“If I need help, he’ll know and be there instantly. Besides, if I can’t get him to talk, no one can unless you have someone with a skill I believe is outlawed almost everywhere.”

The massive woman shifted and frowned. “I wish sometimes but no, we do not. The old way of getting information is all I have. As long as you get information I can use, don’t worry about what happens to him. My superiors won’t care as long as we have results.”

Tanila nodded once.

Max stopped Tanila as she prepared to open the door and leaned in close. “You certain you want to do this?”

Tanila studied Max’s face. She could see the concern and worry in his eyes. He knew what she was about to do, and that scared him more than he was going to say. The urge to not give in got worse every time.

“I’ll probably have to kill him or have Seth do it if that is still okay.”

Vella nodded, and Max let go of Tanila’s hand, accepting the kiss she had given him on his cheek.

As the door closed, the captain leaned against the opposite wall and studied Max.

“For a man who just let his woman go in there, knowing the elf is a murder, you seem very relaxed.”

Chuckling, Max snorted and shook his head. “If you think I’m dangerous, you don’t have a clue what that woman can do.”

Vella grinned, her scar making the smile even bigger. “Sounds like my kind of friend.”

Both of them had waited, ignoring the screams that somehow made it through the sound-dampening walls and door.

Max could sense part of what was going on on the other side. The vibrations of Tanila’s step and the banging of the elf’s feet against the floor told him that whatever was happening, he was glad to be out here in the hallway.

You are right. The way she will drain his mind. It is a very painful thing indeed.

Why… why are there skills like that? Like you?

Laughter came and went as it always did.

Footsteps from the other side moving toward the door, told Max it was over.

He heard the knock and quickly swung it open.

Looking composed and as if she had just woken up from a nap, Tanila stepped out of the doorway and motioned to the elf with her head.

“End him.”

Max felt a chill run down his spine from how she had spoken. Her voice was cold, and there wasn’t an ounce of the woman he knew. Whatever role she had just played in there wasn’t the elf he had come to know.

Max moved behind her, shutting the door and pulling out a knife.

“You were given a chance. You should have spoken to the Captain.”

The elf’s face was expressionless, and the man stared at the ground. It looked like nothing was left in him. Whatever or whoever he had been five minutes ago was gone.

Know that those like her are just as strong. We need to get stronger if we hope to survive and be able to resist them.

Max moved forward and thrusting with the knife at the elf’s heart.

[Power Strike]

It was overkill, but he didn’t care.

A cold wave of power washed over him, and Max was almost surprised.

[11 Dexterity Consumed]

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Consumed has Upgraded Archery to Epic]

Max was barely bothered by the flood of information on how to shoot a bow or crossbow. Instead, the knowledge he had just gained eleven points from one kill made him put a hand on the shoulder of the dead elf and take a moment.

Pulling the dagger free, he wiped the blood off and turned around.

A few items were on the table, and Max realized Tanila had already opened the man's storage device.

Opening the door, Max motioned for Vella and Tanila to come in.

“Part of me hopes he suffered, but from that strike it doesn’t look like it,” Vella said in a gruff tone. “Damn zealots. Always making my life harder around here.”

The Captain turned and froze when she saw that the storage device had been opened. Her eyes immediately went to Tanila, who nodded.

“Will you tell me?”

Tanila smirked and shook her head. “Trust me, you don’t want to know. He opened it for us. I verified it worked.”

The large woman studied Tanila before putting a hand on Max’s shoulder and shaking her head. “You’re right. She’s much tougher than you.”

Laughing, Max moved so that they could all see each other without having to turn their heads constantly.

“So tell us, what did you find out from him?” Max asked.

Taking a deep breath, Tanila let it out and frowned.

“They won’t stop coming. It may be a while, but someone will try again. The last attempt on your life wasn’t them, though.”

“LAST ATTEMPT!?” Vella asked, her voice echoing off the walls and making the two of them wince. “Tell me, have there been more than I already know about?”

“No, you know about all of them. Apparently, I’ve done a fine job of pissing off most of the people in this world,” Max replied. “Perhaps being this attractive makes people jealous.”

Both women groaned, and Tanila rolled her eyes.

“I have an idea,” Tanila continued, ignoring Max’s wink at her, “who is behind this. It will be impossible for you to do anything about it, I’m afraid, Captain Vella.”

“That doesn’t sound good. Why can’t I do anything about the person behind it? You do forget that I have an entire kingdom and the power to put out bounties and hire adventurers to my cause if needed.”

Tanila nodded, and her eyes flickered to Max for a moment. She could see how his eyebrows were scrunched together.

“The problem is I think the person leading this endeavor is one of the children of the King and Queen of the elves.”

Max fought with every ounce of power he had so as not to look dumbstruck, but Vella failed at that moment, her legs going weak for a split second.

The towering woman buckled slightly, and her mouth opened for a brief second. Regaining her composure quickly, she coughed and shook her head.

“You’re serious. A child of the elven King and Queen? How… how could you know this?”

“I’ve been around those circles. There is a daughter who does not like humans and has made problems within her own people even. She seeks the destruction of both humans and dwarves, though she is content to wage war on one before the other. The good news is she doesn’t stay in the elven kingdom very often. The bad news is that it makes finding her… difficult at best.”

Pounding her plated fists together, Vella frowned, her scar causing one of her canine teeth to show. “So now what? Just go back out there and wait for the next attack?”

“That’s exactly what we’ll do,” Max replied. “I’m not planning on staying here. I’ve got to get stronger.”

Vella huffed a few times, obviously frustrated at the news of the possible ring leader and her inability to protect a citizen she was starting to like.

“What about the stuff? You can claim it after we go through it all and look for clues.”

Max shook his head, moving to where Tanila was and grabbing her hand. He lifted it to his lips and kissed the back of it.

“Find a home for it all. Help a new adventurer or someone poor. I’d rather know that those items went for good.”

Both Max and Tanila headed for the door, leaving Vella almost sputtering at the situation.

Before they could get away, Vella stuck her head out into the hallway and shouted at the two of them.

“You know! Before you two showed up, my days and nights were tame. A few drunks, the occasional murder, you know, typical guard work. Now I’ve got potential kingdom espionage, a secret group of idiots trying to even a score, and worse yet, the knowledge that you two are going to be attacked again. I hope you two can’t get sleep tonight, knowing I will be up all night dealing with this!”

Max looked back over his shoulder and saw Vella smiling from ear to ear.

“No worries, Captain! I’m sure we’ll see each other soon enough!”

As they reached the end of the hallway, Tanila saw Max’s face; she couldn’t help but see that he was smirking.

“Why are you smiling like that?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” Max said. I just overheard a few new curses I’ll have to share with Fowl later. For a woman in her position, she sure curses worse than any dwarf I’ve ever met.”

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

Hey all!

Forgive me life has been HECTIC this past week...

Don't forget I'll be gone the 15th-24th doing some humanitarian work in africa.

Everything is locked and loaded. You are good to go with chapters.

Even better new is the chapters for book 4 are scheduled out through 8/21.

Want more?

Ok... book 5 is done.. just editing....

Still reading? Still want more?

Fine... Book 6 has 40k+ words written (and omg... im loving it as are my beta readers...)

Worked on chapter 295 today... 100+ chapters ahead...

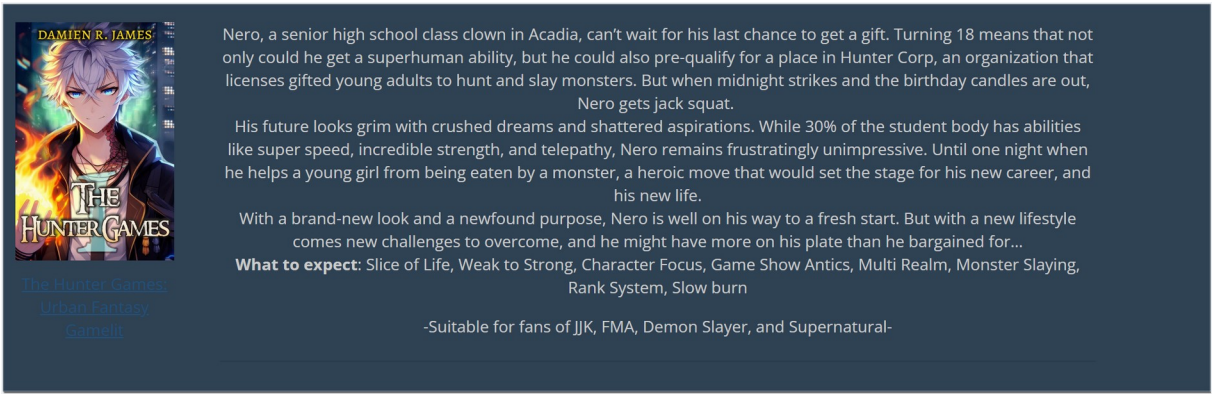
(No... wife is mean.. she said I can't release more...)

As always TY for the love! - Trying to get a little more active on RR - just been craaazy busy getting stuff finalized for trip.

192 - Legendary Crafting [192 - Legendary Crafting - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/89837/the-hunter-games-urban-fantasy-gamelit


DAMIEN R. JAMES
THE HUNTER GAMES
The Hunter Games: Urban Fantasy Gamelit
Nero, a senior high school class clown in Acadia, can't wait for his last chance to get a gift. Turning 18 means that not only could he get a superhuman ability, but he could also pre-qualify for a place in Hunter Corp, an organization that licenses gifted young adults to hunt and slay monsters. But when midnight strikes and the birthday candles are out, Nero gets jack squat.
His future looks grim with crushed dreams and shattered aspirations. While 30% of the student body has abilities like super speed, incredible strength, and telepathy, Nero remains frustratingly unimpressive. Until one night when he helps a young girl from being eaten by a monster, a heroic move that would set the stage for his new career, and his new life.
With a brand-new look and a newfound purpose, Nero is well on his way to a fresh start. But with a new lifestyle comes new challenges to overcome, and he might have more on his plate than he bargained for...
What to expect: Slice of Life, Weak to Strong, Character Focus, Game Show Antics, Multi Realm, Monster Slaying, Rank System, Slow burn
-Suitable for fans of JJK, FMA, Demon Slayer, and Supernatural-

"You sure this is a good idea? Leaving the safety of the faction?"

Max nodded and waved off Tom's concerned expression. "Let's be honest. Sitting around doing nothing isn't going to make my life better, and if I remember, someone told me to live and enjoy life."

"Yes!" exclaimed Tom. "That was before you had someone attempt to kill you! Again!"

Tanila and Max both shrugged and continued walking toward the gate of the property.

"We'll be fine," Tanila informed Tom. "Besides, don't you need to get some items together for us?"

"But... I mean... Uh..." Tom sputtered, unable to find words that made sense.

"We'll be back tomorrow!" Max shouted as he waved at the older man, who had stopped a few feet back. "Don't worry, Dad, I'll have her home before curfew!"

Tom started to curse, and Max and Tanila grinned as they walked past the four guards.

"You're going to owe me big," she whispered as they moved to the carriage waiting for them.

"Well, as Fowl said a few days ago, that should be easier now."

Groaning, Tanila climbed into the cart, ignoring Max's gaze as best as she could.

“This is an impressive list. I take it you two are open to discussion about materials I might want.”

Everett nodded slowly. “On the table, you will find all but a few items that I cannot trade away unless a few other council members that rarely meet agreed upon it.”

Max tried to hide his surprise, having never heard of a council before. He wasn’t sure if Everett was being serious or if he was making up an excuse.

“That is fine. For now, I’ll probably pass on wanting anything. I have a few ideas of things I might want, but unless I see them, I don’t want to tip my hand.”

Everett chuckled and began opening the different chests on the crafting room table.

“I’ll sit here until you get a look at each item. I have the items I suspect you will need in the chest on the table behind you.”

Nodding, Max extended a piece of paper to Everett. “One last thing. This boy on this paper has not yet had his choosing day. It is in a few years, but something tells me the gods themselves may provide another weaponsmith in a few years. Reach out to the dwarf Zach there. Tell them I introduced them to you and that you are interested in possibly forging a relationship.”

Everett groaned at the crafting joke, and Max couldn’t help but smile, honestly having not realized how it sounded until it came out.

“I can send someone to inquire about the boy,” Everett replied. “Do you seriously believe you can tell that this boy, Brian, may have been touched by the gods?”

Max continued looking through the table's chests, nodding and partially ignoring Everett’s question. He wasn’t certain, but inside him, something felt like it might be a possibility.

The chests were easy to get through. Nothing in his skill told him there was a single item that would be worth using with his dragon tooth. It begged the question of whether his faction even possessed items worth using. Without getting a chance to see what was hidden, Max could only build up a reputation and start earning materials he couldn’t collect for himself.

“You can close them. I’ll get started on the list and do what I can. After today, I’ll probably be gone for a week, maybe two, so don’t get anxious if I don’t show up for a bit.”

Everett nodded and began closing the chests. Once they were done, he moved to the door and opened it, turning before going into the hallway. “I’ll leave you to the items. Someone is outside if you need anything or me. I have also left a few drinks and food items in the chest with the materials.”

Grinning, Max waved at Everett. When it was only him and the chest with materials to complete the requests, Max’s grin grew as he headed to heat up the forge.

It was time to craft.

Hours passed, and Max was in the zone. His mind and skill were driving every swing of his hammer, each etching of the special chisels that would carve the runes and

lines he knew needed to be set, all with the intent of housing the weapons he was working on.

Tom had stopped in twice, staying only for a few minutes, never speaking, just watching the impossible that unfolded before his eyes.

Everett had returned near the time Max was finishing up the blade for the sword. He had spent a good half hour just a few meters away, his eyes locked on the process.

Yawning, Max blinked his eyes, knowing it was late into the night. He should be exhausted, but knowing that he was only a few hours from finishing up two weapons at the same time had energized him.

Storing both weapons in his storage, Max moved to the door and opened it.

Sitting on a chair outside was a female dwarf reading a book.

“Excuse me. Can you tell the Faction leader that I’m probably going to be done soon with the requests?”

The woman jumped up immediately and nodded. “I’ll have them here soon if they are still up.”

Smiling, Max shut the door and went back inside, ready to return to work.

He was almost done with the lightning essence. The sword was longer than he would prefer, over four feet in total length. The person it was being crafted for must be much taller to easily handle a one-handed blade this long.

Everett was sitting on a stool, still wiping the sleep from his eyes.

The essence arced occasionally as it moved along the blade, each time almost feeling like it was fighting to break free from the lines Max had carved.

A pop and sizzle came, and the whole sword glowed for a moment, lightning running along the double-edged blade from tip to hilt.

Letting out a sigh of relief, Max nodded and looked at Everett, who had risen to his feet and nodded slowly.

“Still want me to try for the second essence?”

Frowning slightly, the older man winced and studied Max.

“Be honest with me, Joshua. What are our odds it will work?”

“Twenty-five percent, though I’m assuming you know that already,” Max replied with a chuckle. “It’s your essence, so you get to decide if you want to risk it.”

Scratching the scruff on his face, Everett took a moment to consider how rare they were and the risk involved.

“If it was yours, what would you do?”

Laughing, Max shook his head. “Don’t ask me that. As a crafter, I always want to push my limits. You have to decide as the one paying for all this. It will take more time, and if this one fails, we will be done trying to add another essence. How badly do you want this sword to be as powerful as possible?”

Groaning at Max’s words, Everett smirked. “That’s a bastard of a question to ask, and you know it. Fine, let’s give it a try. After all, it’s only money, right?”
Nodding, Max moved to the chest and retrieved the fire essence waiting on him. He was hoping that Everett would risk this. The crafting skill was guiding him, telling Max just how hard this was going to be, and part of him wondered what a Godly weapon would be like.

An hour had passed, and Max was sweating—not from the heat the essence gave off but from the way the blade seemed to sometimes accept the magic of the essence and other times push it away. The core was almost gone, and Max couldn’t decide what the outcome was going to be.

Infuse the blade with your fire magic… flood the essence with your mana.

Max’s hands almost shook as the voice of the skill flooded his mind.

I can do that?

Most crafters do not have magical affinity… you have an elemental affinity. What you can craft is beyond what they can. When you finally acquire what you need for that dragon’s tooth, I will share some guidance with you. That beast may regret sharing that tooth.

Taking a few deep breaths, Max began to pour his magic into the essence, and it grew brighter, almost as if it was growing in size.

Everett shifted on his stool, leaning forward. His eyes studied the essence, which was not acting as he had expected.

Why are you helping me?

Max couldn’t understand why the skill had changed. At one moment, it felt like a whirlpool of desire to consume everything; at another, it was calm and helpful.

Silence seemed to stretch as Max continued to pour mana into the essence, and it flowed into the blade.

We will talk later. Focus for now.

Grunting, Max redoubled his effort, watching as the blade's lines grew brighter. Fire ran up and down the blade, sinking into the runes, and a flash of orange light erupted as the essence soaked into the weapon.

“It worked!” Everett shouted as the older man leaped to his feet. “You did it!”

Max nodded and let out a sigh of relief. “All we need to do is finish it.”

The Faction leader was ecstatic, fist pumping and shadow boxing in the air. When the usually reserved man noticed Max smiling at him, he coughed and grinned. “Forgive me… just a little excited.”

“I understand. Give me a few more minutes, and I’ll have the final product for you.”

“Everett… are you serious?” Tom’s eyes never left the blade as he held it in his hands.

When Max had started the final process of ending the creation of the sword, Everett had sent the dwarf off to get Tom, not caring what time it was.

“Yes, but don’t talk about it. Joshua is adamant about not knowing the stats.”

“Still… this is…” Tom trailed off, hearing a cough from Max as he finished up the dagger they had requested. “Sorry… this is just exceptional.”

“Glad to hear you both like it. Perhaps you should document how excited you both are so when I finally ask for payment, neither of you will complain.”

Each of the older men chuckled and nodded.

“You should ask now,” Tom replied. “I’m not sure how you’ll be able to overcome this moment.”

Max shrugged and turned to finish up the last part of the dagger he was almost done with.

“These stats,” Tom whispered as he handed the sword back to Everett. “She will flip!”

Grinning, Everett took one last look before storing the weapon. “You certain you don’t want a room? It’s been a long night.”

Max shrugged and continued wiping down the blade of the weapon, letting the last bit of magic seep into the places it needed to go.

[Legendary Dagger Crafted]

[5 Experience Gained}

Sighing to himself, Max shook his head in frustration. Those early experience gains had been for crafting something at a higher level the first time. Even the sword had only given him five experience.

“It’s done,” Max said as he set the dagger on a cloth on the bench. The next moment, Max started collecting his tools. He had purchased a dimensional tool pouch that was making keeping up with everything much easier.

“I actually need to head out. Don’t ask, as I haven’t got a clue when I’ll be back. I made a few promises to some others, and I need to make sure I keep them.”

Grunting, Everett nodded and fought the urge to pick up the dagger and inspect it immediately.

“You sure I can’t give you even a little gold? Something to help me feel like I’m not taking advantage of you?”

Max shook his head and stored his tool pouch. “I never charge money. That's always been the way I’ve done it.”

“Well, just know that sword will make a certain tower climber very happy. I could get her to swing by and thank you personally if you want.”

Moving toward the door, Max shrugged. “Maybe one day. For now, I need to go. I’m assuming the woman outside can show me out?”

Both men nodded and turned toward the dagger, waiting for Max to be gone from the room.

The second the door shut, Tom couldn’t hold it in any longer.

“Seventy-five strength and dexterity! On a sword! Do you have any idea how incredible that is?!”

Everett bobbed his head once, his hand already on the dagger.

Those grey eyes of Everett sparkled as his white eyebrows raised in excitement.

“I just wish we knew where that kid came from. This city is becoming a melting pot of impressive people.”

Tom held out his hand and coughed, waiting for a turn to see why his friend was so excited.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

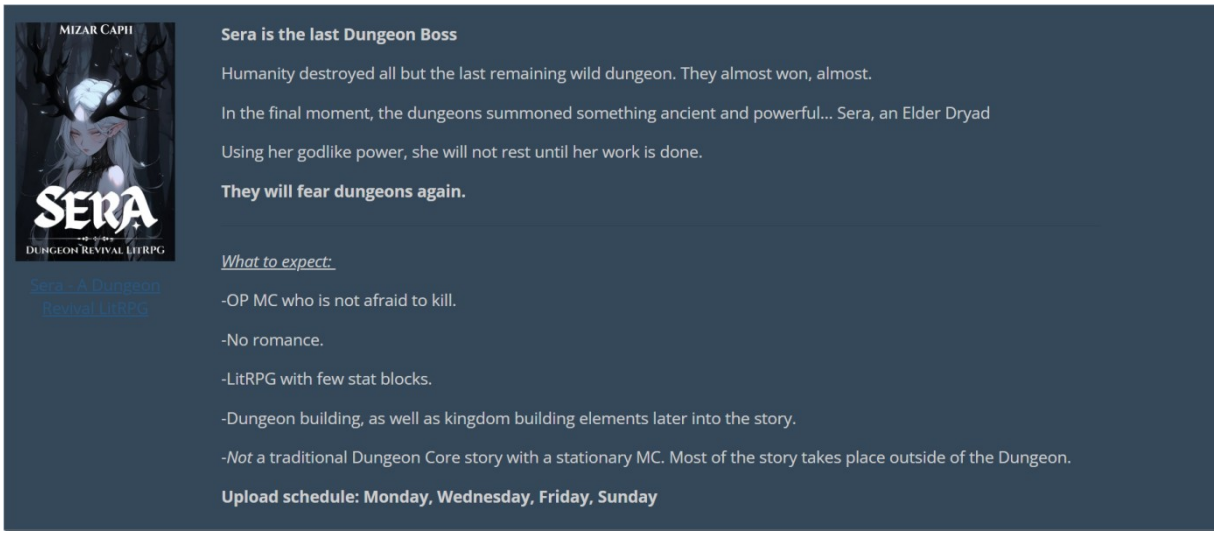
Yesterday i finished chapter 300 for UL1!

its exciting to see where this story is going and thank you for following me on this journey!

193 - Cooked Minotaur 193 - Cooked Minotaur - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/89525/sera-a-dungeon-revival-litrpg


MIZAR CAPII
SERA
DUNGEON REVIVAL LITRPG
Sera - A Dungeon Revival LitRPG
Sera is the last Dungeon Boss
Humanity destroyed all but the last remaining wild dungeon. They almost won, almost.
In the final moment, the dungeons summoned something ancient and powerful... Sera, an Elder Dryad
Using her godlike power, she will not rest until her work is done.
They will fear dungeons again.
What to expect:
-OP MC who is not afraid to kill.
-No romance.
-LitRPG with few stat blocks.
-Dungeon building, as well as kingdom building elements later into the story.
-Not a traditional Dungeon Core story with a stationary MC. Most of the story takes place outside of the Dungeon.
Upload schedule: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday

“Get the left one!” Max shouted, motioning to the furthest minotaur from him.

A pack of three more were charging at them, their cloven hoofs pounding on the hard-pack dirt of the tower floor they were on.

The floor was a mix of farmland with massive corn stalks and other crops filling fields and a village filled with stone and wooden houses and shops.

Massive minatours filled the area, some brown and some black. They were ten feet tall, and the brown ones wielded two axes, while the black ones carried a massive two-handed axe that would make the dungeon ogres jealous.

“Rooting!” Tanila shouted, and Max cast a dark spell on the middle one in the pack of three, charging them.

Roots sprang up and ensnared the one Max had called out, his attention focused on the pair he was currently fighting, grateful the black ones were only using one weapon instead of the two weapons the brown ones Fowl was dealing with used.

“Charge coming!” Fowl called out.

“Mine’s down!” Cordellia yelled as she focused on the black one coming at Fowl. It was coming right at him, the two brown ones flanking the dwarf, their axes causing some injury, but Fowl was dishing out more than he was taking.

A Power Shot zoomed over Fowl’s helmeted head and struck the charging beast in the ringed snout, causing it to stumble and fall, plowing up a good five meters or more of dirt as it skidded face first.

Over twelve corpses were already on the ground, and the fighting was worse than Max had expected as they learned the brown ones could occasionally call for help.

The minotaur on his right swung its axe, and Max saw it flash red.

His sonar and evade skill allowed him to barely duck underneath the slash that almost took his head off, instead swinging wide and past, hacking into its own ally just a yard away.

A loud howl that almost made Max laugh, one that sounded like a cow in distress, came from the black minotaur he had also been facing as its body was cleaved in two.

With a window of opportunity, Max attacked the last one he was facing, ready to end its life.

[Power Strike]

His weapon cleaved through the midsection, cutting through the chain armor the beast wore. The top half toppled to the ground, and a cold sensation flowed through Max.

[Consume has Consumed a skill]

[Current Skill is Equal in Power]

[Storing excess Power]

Resisting the urge to groan, Max had gotten three of those messages now.

Is it too much to ask for their skill to be higher?

Running the ten yards between him and Fowl, Max took off one of the legs on the brown minotaur Fowl was facing before making his way to the new additions.

Without missing a beat, Fowl turned and focused on the one on his left, leaving the one Max had just immobilized alone.

Everyone was panting slightly and sweating. One last group had joined the fray. Before Fowl had brained in the single-legged beast, it had mooed loudly, bringing another pack of beef to the slaughterhouse.

“Twenty-one… that wasn’t too bad, was it?”

“I think our dwarf is crazy,” Cordellia called out from across the distance.
“Not *too* bad he says…”

Cutting a few more horns off, Max stored them and watched as everyone worked together, harvesting a few items from the corpses.

“I’m just glad there aren’t any balls to be collected,” Fowl said. “Imagine the pair swinging from these things…”

Everyone chuckled as Fowl started to shudder.

Max moved to one of the houses and climbed up on the roof, moving to the peak and staring out over the tower floor. It was smaller than they all felt it should be. The

sides of the left no doubt that this space wasn’t as big as the rest they had fought in. Even the fifth floor was bigger.

“I still don’t see a portal, but there is an open space inside the village with some covering. Maybe a boss?”

“Only for you four,” Cordellia called out with a grin. “Everyone else would just find more things to kill.”

The battle in the village hadn’t gone much better as more minotaurs continually came. Even attempting to kill the brown ones first, they sometimes called for help even before they were within melee range.

It had taken a few hours, but they had cleared out most of the town the hard way, fighting through massive fights of eight to seventeen minotaurs in a row. A few materials were dropped, but nothing, besides some extra two-handed axes that Max liked to keep on hand, were usable for weaponsmithing.

As they gazed at the hole in the center of town, Max felt the overwhelming presence of dread coming from it. Moving to the edge, Max sensed with his new sonar skill that it had a thirty-foot drop before a floor was visible.

Tiny amounts of light could be seen from what they all knew had to be a tunnel or something.

“We’re going down there, aren’t we?” Batrire asked. “I mean, why not… who doesn’t want to climb down into a tunnel under the ground?”

“At least I have rope Max said as he started tying it to a wooden column that was near the hole. “I’ll go first, make sure it's safe, and then the rest of you can come down afterward.”

“Glad to see you’re still a gentleman,” Tanila teased before rolling her eyes. “We’re going to have to work on acquiring some kind of light source that won’t make us hold a lightstone in our hands.”

“I have something like that,” Cordellia said as her eyes darted about. A moment later, she pulled out a backpack and set it on the ground. Digging through it, she offered the glass orb to Tanila. “When you need to, smash it on the ground. A ball of light will appear and follow you. Depending on how much light you ask for, it can last from four to twenty-four hours. Tom has some for sale.”

Max stood near the hole, holding the rope between his hands, and watched as the two women talked.

“When you’re done, just know I’m about to jump in. Fowl can go last.”

“What?!” Fowl gasped. “Why me?”

“To protect us women,” Batrire replied with a groan.

Snorting, Fowl shook his head. “Something tells me you three are quite capable of that yourself.

Max waited at the entrance to the tunnel, his Sonar skill giving him a sense of the massive tunnel system they were about to enter.

Cut stones lined the floor and ceiling, and a slight incline told him they were going to descend into the earth. A pair of torches about twenty and fifty yards ahead gave off a small amount of light. They flickered in the tunnel, and Max knew that the next part of what they were about to face would get worse.

“How tall are the ceilings?”

Without turning, Max knew Tanila had come down first.

“Right now twelve feet but they get a little taller, maybe fourteen as we go deeper,” he replied. “You and I might need to be ready to stone, ice and wind wall if things get crowded. Fighting twenty or more creatures in here can get bad.”

Bobbing her head, Tanila studied the tunnel. They were about six yards apart, and with the limited height, they could easily create a choke point section until the creatures inside broke through.

“Any guesses on what we’ll face?”

Max smirked and shook his head. “Only one way to find out.”

“Another group is incoming!” Max yelled.

Tanila was limited to just helping him hold the choke points of the tunnel with walls, unable to get any rest and regain her mana.

Twenty minutes had passed since their first fight, and it had been a nonstop rush of minotaurs.

Max had cast multiple fireballs into the pack through the gap in their rotating barrier of stone, ice, and air walls.

The pack of minotaurs was at least six deep, and they continued to fall back toward the spot where they had dropped down.

“We’re only twenty yards or so away from our rope!” Cordellia called out.

A steady barrage of arrows shot into the mass of black and brown monsters, and the stone tunnel they were fighting in was filled with the wonderful scent of roasted beef.

Fowl stood slightly to the left with his shield and hammer, holding the creatures at bay. His strength and speed kept the horde of burnt minotaurs from moving through the opening and reaching the rest of the party. Max was on the right, his halberd hacking through the ones who got a turn in the meat grinder.

“What are we going to do?” Batrire shouted.

The trepidation in their voices concerned Max as he knew if they got pushed back into the spot they had come down, there would be no retreating. The tunnel was allowing those stupid brown minotaurs to call for help with ease, their insistent mooing echoing off the walls.

“Can you hold the entrance?” Max shouted over the battle's din. “I can try something after the next walls are up!”

“I got ya!” Fowl shouted back, his hammer smashing into the black minotaur before him in the knee, buckling it and sending the creature to the ground.

“Tanila! Next wall summons, I’ll go inside! Be ready to fireball!”

Without waiting to hear her respond, Max started getting into position. They would need to back up a few yards to give Fowl time to adjust to his new spot. Hopefully, their dwarven warrior could hold the rush while Max attacked from behind.

“Wall in five!” Tanila called out.

Max slashed once, taking a leg off of the newest monster to step through. Then he jumped back, preparing to match Tanila’s spell.

Fowl moved back quickly, getting into position while waiting for the new blockade to spring into place.

Two ice walls formed, and Fowl attacked the black minotaur that came over its fallen ally. Its two-handed axe struggled to swing as it wanted. The lower ceiling and the packed area made their attempts at fighting back almost impossible.

Max moved forward, trusting his team to hold on.

[Demonic Teleportation]

Coming out of the portal, Max could see the group of about nine brown minotaurs, all near the back, allowing the other ones to push forward. They almost seemed content to take turns, mooing and letting their voices echo back down the space behind them.

A blast of fire erupted from the front, washing over the rows of beef between Max and his allies.

Time to get to work!

With his weapon already moving, Max started hacking at the backs of those creatures. They hadn’t noticed him yet, and the first two fell before one realized what was happening. It barely got off a call for help before Max had cut it in half from the waist. They were not as strong or as tough as the other ones.

As one, the next row turned, and Max let the fireball he had been building up go, the flames roaring into the back line.

Cries of pain and the smell of burning meat filled the tunnel, and Max smiled as he dove in, a whirlwind of death even without the use of his skills.

Legs, arms, and torsos fell victim to his skill and their ability to attack was marred by the pressing of bodies now trying to turn and get to Max.

In less than thirty seconds, the group of brown minotaurs was down, and all that remained were some badly burnt and injured black ones.

“One more spell!”

Max wasn’t sure if his voice was heard over the sounds the cows made, but when a fireball from Tanila impacted in their midst, it provided the last aid he needed before killing the few monsters that had not succumbed to the flames.

Fowl was soon before Max, smiling and laughing.

“You ok?” Max asked, seeing how his friend was behaving.

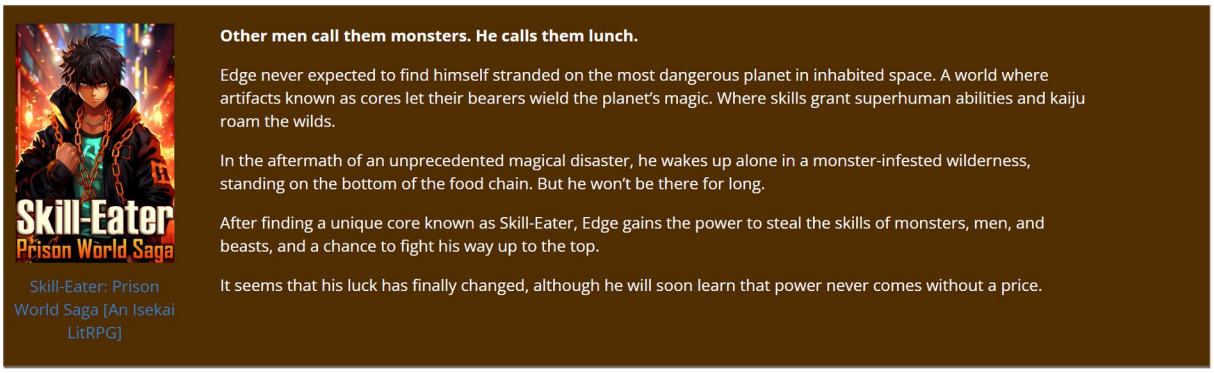
“Never better,” Fowl replied, storing his weapon and shield. “I just wish I knew if it would be okay to eat one of these guys. They smell amazing.”

Groaning, Max could only shake his head. He had wondered the same thing, too.

194 - Outsmarting the Tower[194 - Outsmarting the Tower - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

[Fiction Page] Isekai. LitRPG. Strong to Stronger. Male MC. Fantasy. Magic. Devour. Outlaw Society.


Skill-Eater
Prison World Saga
Skill-Eater: Prison World Saga [An Isekai LitRPG]
Other men call them monsters. He calls them lunch.
Edge never expected to find himself stranded on the most dangerous planet in inhabited space. A world where artifacts known as cores let their bearers wield the planet’s magic. Where skills grant superhuman abilities and kaiju roam the wilds.
In the aftermath of an unprecedented magical disaster, he wakes up alone in a monster-infested wilderness, standing on the bottom of the food chain. But he won’t be there for long.
After finding a unique core known as Skill-Eater, Edge gains the power to steal the skills of monsters, men, and beasts, and a chance to fight his way up to the top.
It seems that his luck has finally changed, although he will soon learn that power never comes without a price.

“We really need to figure out how those brown cows are bringing so many allies,” Batrire said as she watched Fowl check all the corpses. “Is it like a magical summoning spell, or are there really that many of these things inside this tunnel system?”

Shrugging, Max stared off down the tunnel.

“I can scout and bring back whatever I find. If we go slow, we might be able to decrease the number of additional groups that attack. My biggest concern is what lies further down the tunnel,” Max replied. “This spot helps us being as low as it does, but if we get somewhere with a twenty- or thirty-foot roof or the tunnel gets wider, we’ll be unable to bottleneck them like we did.”

“So, you’re planning to venture down the tunnel and lure back a group or two at a time?” Cordellia inquired, her voice filled with curiosity. “I wonder, what could possibly go wrong with that?”

Everyone turned their attention to the newest member of their group, Cordellia, and noticed the mischievous smirk she couldn’t hide. The sound of laughter reverberated

off the cold, hard stones, creating a brief moment of respite from the tension and worry that had settled after their last battle.

“Well, we’d send Fowl, but with legs as short as his, he’d never make it back in time,” Max informed her.

Fowl held up his middle finger at his human friend, grinning the entire time.

Slowly, Max made his way down the tunnel, doing his best to stay silent on the cold, hard worked-stone. The occasional bit of gravel or other rocks were lying on top of the dirt-packed area. Fresh hoof marks showed the path of those that had come at their group.

The ceiling was getting taller, and now that he was about two hundred yards past the group, he could feel that it was probably high enough that a minotaur could manage to get over one if it jumped right. That meant they really needed to stay put and pull creatures to their choke point.

His sonar revealed that the tunnel was turning up ahead, and he could sense an opening into something even bigger.

The number of torches on the wall began to increase, yet the light they gave off almost didn’t seem to improve. It had to be something magical, keeping a certain ambiance and mystique to what they were going to find.

As the tunnel turned, a giant opening appeared, and Max almost let out a whistle as he walked toward the open area.

A giant circle-shaped room appeared, well over a hundred yards wide, but about sixty yards of it were missing. A giant stairway descended along the outer wall of the room, and a rushing wind came from deep below.

The stairs were about ten to fifteen yards wide, and each step was about two feet in height. Leaning over the edge, Max could see the bottom went so far down that the darkness of it swallowed up the torches sunk into the wall along the stairs.

About seventy yards away, a pack of four minotaurs faced upward on the steps: three black and a brown one.

Frowning, Max slipped away quietly from the edge and made his way back to his team.

“That sounds like both a good thing and a bad thing,” Tanila said. “The advantage of limited space to fight in and having the high ground is nice. Cordellia would be able to use her bow effectively and provided no one gets knocked off the edge. We should be good.”

“But without knowing how far down it goes, the other question I’m most worried about is how long we might end up fighting,” Batrire replied. “Mana isn’t an issue for one of us, but you and I need to be smart, and if we’re having to build walls to funnel them in, it might cause some problems.

“I still think Seth’s plan to push as many off as possible is a great idea,” Fowl stated. “Surely you two can manage that with your spells.”

Rubbing his bald head, Max nodded and saw the look Tanila was giving him. Her eyes showed concern, everyone knowing that if someone fell off the ledge, there was a long fall that would most likely end in death.

“How much damage will Bulwark and Armored Warrior mitigate?”

Fowl turned to look at Max, his fluffy eyebrows raised as he did. “You're not thinking about if one falls off and trying to activate before hitting the ground, are you?”

“Just as a last resort. Could one survive a fall of a quarter mile? Half a mile?”

The dwarf warrior shrugged and grimaced.

“I don’t want to test it, but I think you have a skill that would make everything not matter.”

Max’s eyes perked up as he tried to consider what Fowl was saying.

“I don’t think it works like that,” he replied. “The speed at which I’m moving carries over when I come out of the portal.”

“But if you made yourself go upward, wouldn’t that speed cancel out?”

A pain formed in Max’s head as Tanila and Batrire gasped in shock. They stared at Fowl, who seemed surprised at their looks.

“How did you even think about that?” Max asked. “I mean, I’m not sure, but maybe… that seems like a lot of math, and I haven’t tested it yet.”

“Oh… just when I was younger and some of us were in a cart, we were idiots running off the back and trying to jump, seeing if we could run fast enough to fall straight down. Usually, it didn’t work, mainly because our legs are short and the cart wasn’t long, but it reminded me of that.”

Chuckling, Max smiled and gave his friend a gentle shove.

“If I have to test it, I’ll let you know, but in the meantime, I’d prefer not to.”

Batrire came over and gave her man a kiss on the cheek.

“Who knew I loved a dwarf with a brain?”

“Bah, screw you all,” Fowl cursed as he grinned. “So, are we ready to go?”

Everyone nodded, and the group moved down the tunnel in the direction of what Max had found.

At the top of the stairs, Max decided that the best choice was to use their spells and bow to maximize the damage before the minotaurs reached them. Without a surefire way to kill the brown one in the pack, adds were going to come, and all they could do was prepare for them.

“Walls will be set, and Fowl will stay near the edge. With his armor, he can’t get knocked off and provides the coverage for there,” Max said as they prepared for their

first fight. “I’ll stand next to him and keep the wall closest to me. Tanila calls for wall changes, and we back up as needed. Any last questions?”

Everyone shook their heads as Max and Fowl descended about ten steps, giving them room to retreat a few if needed while the others stayed on the upper part of the giant hole.

“Here goes,” Max declared as he summoned a massive fireball and nodded at Cordellia.

His spell flew across the open area, casting an orange and red glow as it raced across. The range on it wasn’t designed to be perfect, yet his goal was to ignite the spot where the pack of four was.

Cordellia had much better aim, and as she waited for his spell to connect, she began losing arrow after arrow upon the beasts.

A loud roar followed by a long, drawn-out moo signaled that the fight had begun.

The fireball had impacted near the front, catching two of the black monsters on fire. Their archer had managed to get two arrows to hit the smaller brown one.

More roars and moos came from below and the sound of hooves on stone echoed through the darkness below.

“Goblin shite,” Fowl muttered as he held his mace and shield ready. “Sounds like a stampede.”

A snort came from Batrire, yet everyone watched the edges of the stairs they could see. Soon, shapes were making their way upward, running past the torches and blocking the light for a moment, signaling that a stampede was on its way.

The first group made it to them in less than ten seconds, black minotaurs charging upward and at the two defenders.

The monster’s long two-handed axes prepared to unleash pain upon the dwarf, and the human never got a chance as Tanila sent a giant stone toward them, knocking them down as it rolled along the stairway and into the other two, sending the brown one over the edge.

“YES!” their mage shouted as the boulder continued to bounce and descend along the edge of the stairs. Her angle had been perfect, forcing the group toward the hole.

Max wanted to rush forward, cutting down the two who were standing up but waited, letting Cordellia put in the work, sending arrows that sunk deep into their hide, making them start to look like a porcupine.

More roars and mooing came as the sound of the stone still rolling down the stairs found the next group about seventy yards behind, surprised at the ball of death.

“Hurry up, already!” Fowl groaned as one of the first two finally reached him and Max.

Its axe came down, and the dwarf warrior easily deflected it to the stone he was standing on. This left the beast open for Max to swing his halberd and cut through its arm and into its chest.

Stumbling, it tumbled over the side, roaring as it fell into the black hole to the right. The sound finally ended after ten seconds.

“That sounds like a long fall,” Fowl exclaimed as he waited for the second minotaur, which made the same mistake. It attacked the dwarf and got its attack blocked while losing an arm and a chunk of its chest to Max.

Max sent it over the edge with a shove, letting it join its fallen ally.

“We got incoming!” Cordellia shouted as her bow continued to sound like a bard’s harp, the snapping of the string audible from the number of arrows she was letting fly.

Max leaned over slightly to get a better look, wishing he could see as good as the elf obviously could, but winced at the sight.

“There are like forty already, and maybe more coming!”

“Let them build up and then use a rock!” Tanila yelled. “I’ll be ready soon! Prepare your next wall when the next group gets here.”

Max nodded and found himself grinning, listening to her giving orders.

It’s about time everyone started carrying their own weight.

He chuckled at his own joke, knowing that phrase would get him in trouble, taking out the last of the first pack with Fowl.

“Get ready to smell cooked beef,” Max quipped. “This is going to take a while.”

Fowl chuckled and nodded, banging his shield and weapon together as a pack of five raced toward them, three of them already peppered with a dozen arrows.

Time stretched on, but the truth was they had already defeated a hundred of the minotaurs, and the wave of monsters that had originally felt like it would never end was coming to a halt.

The last pack had struggled to make it over the fallen ones on the stairs, now slick from the blood left by their death. Even when the bodies dissolved and left behind the gem, the blood had stayed longer, causing a dangerous ascent to become even worse.

Both Max and Tanila had alternated their boulder abilities, letting groups build-up, sending one down, bowling over anywhere from four or five to once, almost a dozen, as it rolled along the wall, forcing the beasts to stand near the edge.

Max would then send out fireballs, causing an explosion that sent others tumbling over and helping him to keep his mana high.

“Almost four hundred arrows,” Cordellia said as she swapped out another quiver. “Like shooting pigs in a pen, but I really don’t feel bad about it.”

Batrire sighed, having been the only one who did very little.

“You four did great. I was impressed with the teamwork. Now, rest up, and we can see about slowly making our way down,” their healer informed everyone. I don’t want to be stupid and get overconfident. “Something tells me we weren’t supposed to be able to do this.”

Their ranger laughed and shook her head, causing her braid to whip back and forth.

“I’ve fought in the tower for months. You four have done more than any group I have been with, and I doubt even Dexis’s group could compete,” she said. “The combination of spells and abilities you bring is beyond anything I can expect the tower is designed for. Most mages only pick up earth for the root and wall portion, rarely advancing it till way later if they can. Those who actually hit level one hundred, which, as you know, is super rare. They would save those points, excited at the day they got elemental mastery.”

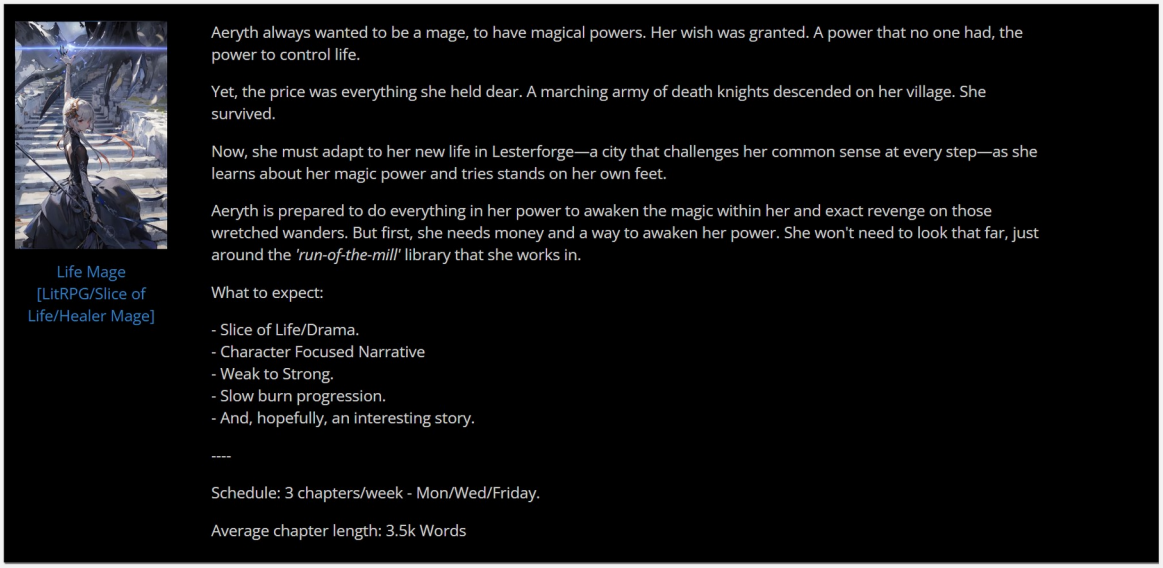
Nodding, Max bent down and collected a few of the gems near them, waiting for the bodies to decay and not bothering to harvest anything right now.

“It seems like that’s the tower's problem, not ours,” he replied with a smug grin.

195 - The Biggest Bull [195 - The Biggest Bull - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/88669/life-mage-litrpgslice-of-lifehealer-mage


Life Mage [LitRPG/Slice of Life/Healer Mage]
Aeryth always wanted to be a mage, to have magical powers. Her wish was granted. A power that no one had, the power to control life.
Yet, the price was everything she held dear. A marching army of death knights descended on her village. She survived.
Now, she must adapt to her new life in Lesterforge—a city that challenges her common sense at every step—as she learns about her magic power and tries stands on her own feet.
Aeryth is prepared to do everything in her power to awaken the magic within her and exact revenge on those wretched wanders. But first, she needs money and a way to awaken her power. She won't need to look that far, just around the 'run-of-the-mill' library that she works in.
What to expect:
- Slice of Life/Drama.
- Character Focused Narrative
- Weak to Strong.
- Slow burn progression.
- And, hopefully, an interesting story.

Schedule: 3 chapters/week - Mon/Wed/Friday.
Average chapter length: 3.5k Words

“The stairs end down below and there is a massive amount of gems at the bottom,” Max informed everyone after climbing back up the stairs to where they were waiting a few hundred yards off.

“And?” Fowl asked. “I can tell by your face there is more.”

Nodding, Max pointed in the direction he knew another room was in.

“Two large doors, easily twenty-five feet tall, are down there. The bottom of the stairs ends there, and then it’s just those waiting to be opened.”

“Let’s go then,” Batrire said. “I’m closing in on my next level, and I know Fowl is probably nearing the edge of it as well.”

Cordellia snorted, and their healer turned to see what she was grinning about.

“Sorry, I hit level fifty-seven a floor ago, and after the second set of minotaurs on the stairs, I may be halfway to fifty-eight by the time we finish.”

“I just can’t believe I’m almost level fifty-five,” Fowl said. The experience has been beyond what I imagined, and I’m certain that, based on the number of crystals, I’ll be tower level six also.”

Everyone smiled as they descended the stairs, knowing they were still achieving the impossible: leveling faster than most could ever dream possible.

“That isn’t what I wanted to see,” Tanila said as they stared at the black metal doors that were at the bottom.”

Everyone nodded as they studied the design etched into the door. A single huge minotaur almost as tall as the doors stood etched in the metal. Half of its body was on each door, and a huge club rested on its shoulder.

“It almost feels like the tower is letting us know what's behind the door,” Cordellia stated. “Dexic mentioned that it happened a few times and often that the boss was harder than usual.”

Fowl groaned and rolled his eyes, looking at the ranger, who just shrugged at his complaint.

“Better to tell you now,” she replied.

“Well, let’s prepare,” Batrire said as she cast her buff again. “Thoughts on a plan?”

Max glanced at Fowl and Tanila, waiting to hear what they might offer.

“I’d say not die, but that’s obvious,” their dwarven warrior joked. “I’ll taunt and make sure it's on me. If I’m honest, I feel we should be fine. Unless it's broken beyond measure, with my new item, the stats I have, and everything we can throw at it, we just need to be smart and kill it.”

“The room and space we have will determine a lot,” Tanila added. “The tighter the room, the harder it will be, but as our brave warrior, Fowl stated, we got this.”

Nodding, Max waited for Batrire to give him the go-ahead and moved to where the doors were. Putting his hands against them, he pushed with everything he had, watching as they swung open slowly.

Torches started igniting along a long tunnel and down into the darkness as the doors moved apart. Wind from nowhere came behind them and rushed down the tunnel, causing the torches that had just ignited to flicker and move.

“That’s creepy as hell,” Fowl muttered. “Okay, I’ll go first. Max is next. Everyone else, stay close to Batrire. She can shield if needed.”

The dwarf took the lead, and after all five of them had made it about twenty yards into a tunnel that seemed to stretch, the doors behind them suddenly slammed shut, sending a shockwave through the worked stone floors they were walking on.

The tunnel stretched on for about a third of a mile, and then a large open room appeared. As they got closer, they could see that standing on the far end of the seventy-five-yard wide circular room was a minotaur that matched exactly what was drawn on the door. A huge beast with a club that was ten feet long rested upon one shoulder as it held it easily with a single hand. One of its two horns was broken off, leaving a jagged edge. Chain armor hung from its shoulders and down past most of its legs. Each breath that it took sent a small amount of steam from its nostrils, and the darkest pair of black eyes watched as they moved toward its domain.

“The floor, it's dirt,” Fowl said as he glanced back for a second at the group. “The room is what, fifty meters high? Solid walls. There's nowhere to hide or run.”

Max nodded, his eyes scanning everything. He saw the stone they were about to move across and grunted, pointing at it.

“This will rise up, locking us in. No way to turn back after that.”

“We didn’t come here to run,” Fowl replied, his sudden lack of fear coming from his fondness for the chest piece he wore that would soon be gone in a few more floors.

True to Max’s thought, as soon as the group had moved past the stone tunnel and stood on the dirt of the area, the wall behind them moved quickly upward, sealing them in with the beast.

Once the sound of the stone wall connected with the ceiling, the boss roared, and its massive club ignited with fire.

“Oh shite!” Fowl cried when he saw the flaming weapon. “Be ready!”

Pawing at the ground with its cloven hooves, the boss began to lean forward slightly.

“Spread out! Move forward!” Max shouted as he prepared for what was going to come next.

As Max winced, Fowl jogged ahead, shield and weapon at the ready.

The choice of weapon or using a shield was hard. His damage was always more when using two hands, but seeing the massive club the boss carried sent a few concerns through his mind.

An ear-splitting roar came, and the boss raced toward Fowl, covering the distance in seconds as its body flashed yellow.

“Bulkwark!” Fowl shouted a second before impact, his body glowing with the activation of his ability.

The boss’s head was lowered so low its nose almost drug in the dirt as it slammed into Fowl’s shield.

A pained grunt came as both impacted, neither moving for a moment, and blood gushed from the head of the boss.

Even Fowl groaned, his hit points decreasing a third from the single attack that was reduced from what would have been immediate death, leaving him gasping for air.

“Healing!” Batrire called out as her hands began to glow.

No one waited; with that much damage the boss had received from Fowl’s thorn aura, there was no doubt how pissed it was at the tiny warrior.

Dashing forward, Max cast Frost Nova, not sure how much it was going to help, but every second mattered.

A massive ice spear formed in the air above Tanila, and if someone was paying attention to Cordellia, they would see her arrow glowing.

Destruction rained down upon the boss as the spear connected to the creature's shoulder. As it stood upright, the creature lifted its club to prepare to start attacking with it.

The arrow slammed into the boss’s head, knocking it backward slightly but causing a gash across the cheek that it had hit in its hide.

Max got to the boss, ran behind it, and activated Stealth.

He swung with everything in his body and went for the minotaur's flesh right above its hoof of the left leg.

[Power Strike]

His weapon sliced into the thick skin, and with the armor not descending this low, it cut about a foot deep, causing the creature to roar. Blood sprayed out along the dirt, and the boss backed up a step on its injured leg, stepping over Max.

The minotaur suddenly shimmered yellow, and then the right leg rose up and descended so fast that Max could only track it with his sonar skills.

Waves of force radiated around them, causing the ground to rise and fall, just like when the earth elemental had used such an attack.

Fowl's armor kept him standing somehow, rising and lowering as he stepped toward the right leg and slammed into it with his mace.

Tanila fell down, as did Batrire, yet Cordellia saw the waves and was able to jump up and down, timing them and avoiding the falls the others seemed to be struggling with.

Being at the center of everything, Max was left mostly unaffected, precariously perched underneath the beast.

He cast an air wall under Tanila as she started falling backward when the soil fell from the four-foot rise.

She gave him a nod as she climbed onto it, glad the wall had given her a place to stand.

Turning, she waited for the same thing to happen to Batrire and cast a wall of air under her, suspending their healer above the undulating ground.

"Holy elf tits!" Batrire shouted as she began casting small heals on herself and their mage, both having taken damage from the attack.

Max's weapon swung from the safety of his spot and connected again with the same wound, barely doing anything, telling him all he needed to know.

"It's stronger than me and tougher!" We need to–"

His words cut off as the boss lept backward, freeing itself from the annoying gnat between its legs. As it landed, the flaming weapon was finally in position and ready to be used.

It came forward, striding with steps that didn't seem bothered by the damage he had done. It brought the flaming club down toward Fowl, roaring in anger and hate.

Dodging to the side, Fowl raised his shield at an angle to prevent a head-on collision. The strike hit the dirt, spraying it everywhere and blanketing the area in a cloud of dust.

Max used that distraction to attack again, running and aiming at the same wound, trying to find a way to bring down the beast or limit its mobility.

As he got close, the creature lifted its leg, taking the designated target out of his range.

Cursing, he spun, delivering a strike to the other area above the ankle, finding the axe blade of his halberd barely cutting off a few hairs against its skin.

His sonar told him a kick was coming from the injured leg, and Max rolled to the side to avoid the attack. Without missing a beat, the boss was using the momentum to step and bring its club at Fowl again, swinging low along the ground and right into a path where the dwarf couldn't dodge or do much to deflect it.

The club clanged against the metal, and flames washed over the dwarf, blackening the dirt to his side as the two met again. Fowl slid across the dirt about two yards but was still upright, his chest piece doing most of the heavy lifting as the root skill kept him from being sent flying across the room.

Batrire cast two heals in rapid succession, trying to get her man's life back up past the two-thirds point. Each blow caused more damage than one might believe was possible.

The boss leaned back its head, roaring as it lifted its club. Another salvo of arrows pierced its neck and face as Cordellia unleashed everything she had at it.

Still, the creature seemed more upset that none of its attacks were working as it expected, and each time it struck the dwarf, blood started seeping from its body.

Each arm had red streaks coming from under its chain armor and was beginning to soak through. A little bit of blood was sent spraying from its snout each time it breathed heavily.

A massive barrage of three attacks with its club, each short but powerful, came down upon Fowl, who did everything in his ability to block the blows and deflect them.

"Special!"

Batrire had to use her powerful heal, bringing the dwarf back to full health after he suddenly dropped almost to one-third of his hit points.

As the minotaur lifted its arms, preparing to strike at Fowl again, the largest ice spear Max had ever seen Tanila release streaked forward toward the boss, impaling itself in the creature's left eye.

Stumbling backward, the boss's attack slammed into the ground, missing the dwarf as it let go with its right hand and reached for the chunk of ice sticking out of its eye socket.

Yanking it free, the beast howled and glanced around the room with its one good eye until it found the one who had done that.

Roaring, it charged toward her, its weapon flashing green as it began to grab it with two hands.

"TAUNT!" Max shouted as he cast an air wall before the creature's chest, trying to slow it down.

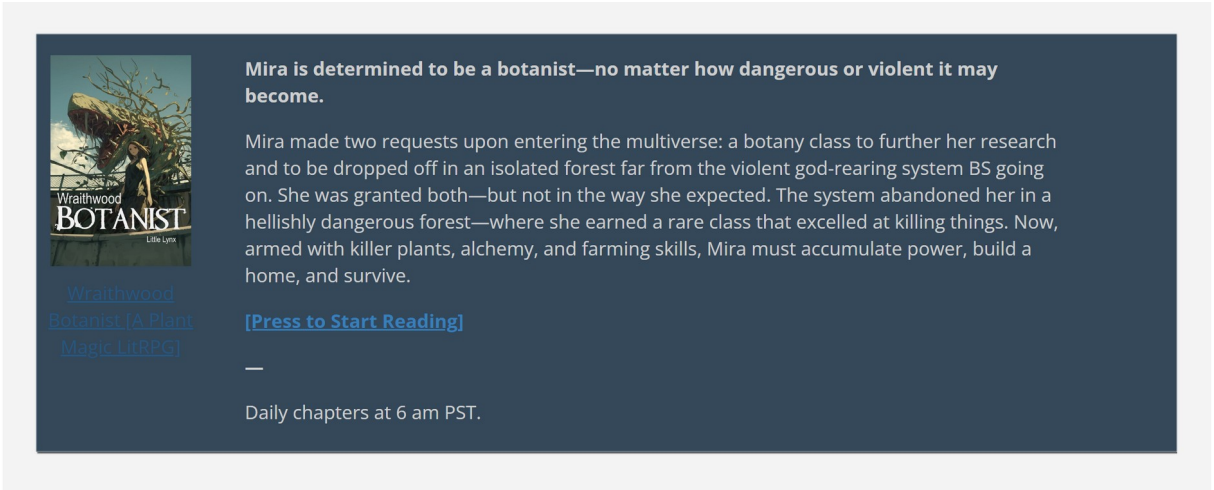
For the briefest moment, the boss turned toward the dwarf warrior when his taunt went off. The minotaur's direction and gaze shifted, and then its body flashed black.

The next second, its eyes were on the mage once more, moving toward the one that had just pained it the most.

196 - Upgrading a Weapon [196 - Upgrading a Weapon - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/89038/wraithwood-botanist-a-plant-magic-litrpg/chapter/1690751/chapter-1-welcome-to-the-multiverse


Wraithwood
BOTANIST
Wraithwood Botanist [A Plant Magic LitRPG]
Mira is determined to be a botanist—no matter how dangerous or violent it may become.
Mira made two requests upon entering the multiverse: a botany class to further her research and to be dropped off in an isolated forest far from the violent god-rearing system BS going on. She was granted both—but not in the way she expected. The system abandoned her in a hellishly dangerous forest—where she earned a rare class that excelled at killing things. Now, armed with killer plants, alchemy, and farming skills, Mira must accumulate power, build a home, and survive.
[Press to Start Reading]
—
Daily chapters at 6 am PST.

Max started to shout as the minotaur raced toward the woman he loved, its weapon prepped to end the life of anyone struck by that weapon.

Without waiting, he did only what he could think of.

Planting its legs, the boss swung its club, the trails of flame making an arc that lingered in everyone's vision as they saw it coming toward Tanila, who couldn’t move in time.

Max appeared in the middle of the air, shield out before the swing in the middle of the air.

[Demonic Teleport]

[Bulwark]

[Armored Warrior]

[Regeneration]

The club connected against Max in the air, striking the shield he held tight against his body.

A cracking sound came, and one moment, Max was in midair. The next he was sent flying, slamming into the stone wall of the boss room, bouncing off of it, and skipping across the floor like a rock.

Half of a broken shield lodged itself in the ground near Batrire, just a few feet away from splitting her in half.

All the momentum of the swing was gone, and the flaming club flashed again before vanishing.

Still, the boss didn't turn to see what had stopped the strike. Enraged, it almost pulled back its club again, swinging at Tanila once more.

As the flaming weapon came at her, it hit a glowing barrier, bouncing off and leaving a trail of flames that washed around it.

Attack after attack came, slamming into the glowing barrier, doing nothing as Fowl struck at its wounded left leg with his mace, causing blood to pour from the wound.

"FOWL!"

The eyes of all three women were wide, looking upward at the only eye the boss had, absolute hatred pouring from the black eye as it tried to kill the elf.

Stopping his swings, Fowl activated his late birthday gift from Tom.

It took three seconds, but when it was done, his body flashed white.

"Taunting!"

The moment he said those words and his ring activated, the boss stopped midswing, turning to glare at the dwarf by its feet.

A feeble kick struck Fowl, not moving him, and the minotaur moved, positioning itself to go after the dwarf backing up, creating room between it and the others.

Max struggled to move. Bones were rejoining and popping into place, and he had to wait for his right arm to heal enough to pry the shield folded against his arm off. Storing it, he watched the fight, unable to join, and grinned.

That item… it's worth the gold, I guess

Fowl had acquired the ring from Tom a week ago. He had saved it from the days in the tower and, after seeing and hearing how close things had gotten, gave it to the warrior. Only a single charge was left, the other two having been used while he climbed, but still, the man had given away a valuable treasure.

A late birthday gift indeed.

Smiling, even though it hurt, Max watched as his friend protected the women they loved, drawing the boss further away. He rose as his bones finished healing and the last two joints popped into place.

Glaring at the boss, Max raced toward it, pulling his halberd out and knowing what needed to be done.

“I’m here!” Max shouted as he raced around the boss toward its injured left leg. Getting into position, he started to swing at the wound again, smiling this time.

[Demonic Magic]

[Magical Strike]

[Rampage]

He hadn’t tested this combo yet, and the idea of using so many demonic souls hurt, but it was time to end this.

His blade shimmered and went black.

In the blink of an eye, he struck their times, each one carrying over the effect of the Magical Strike since Rampage was apparently considered a single melee attack. Demonic magic caused the boss’s leg to turn green, and after all three strikes sliced through the tender section, the boss tumbled sideways, four feet of its left leg now separated from its hoof.

As it fell, the creature howled, and everyone gave it space for where it was going to land.

Blood splattered and gushed all over the dirt from the wound.

Fowl’s strike caused it to bleed faster, and the thorn effect amplified it even more. The flaming club fell from its grip as the boss hit the ground. Max rushed over, storing his halberd and grabbing it with two hands.

Its size shifted, shrinking until it was almost as tall as him. Flames still covered the length of the wooden club, and for the first time since this fight had started, Max grinned.

Trying to roll over, the minotaur was assaulted by arrows and spells as they continued to wear down the creature.

Max came over, swinging with everything, including the weapon that was almost too large for him. The wooden grip was just a little too thick and his weapon crafting skill was giving him ideas on how to solve that problem later.

A roar erupted as the club came down on the hand the boss was using to push against the ground as it tried to rise. Bones broke from the impact, and where the hammer hit, flames transferred to the wounded area, sending up the sweet smell of cooked beef.

Fowl attacked the other hand, keeping it from being able to find purchase as the mace left holes in its skin, blood trickling out.

Falling face first to the dirt as both hands lost their position, the creature let out a snort as dirt covered its bloody face.

Max moved quickly, giving it no time to recover, slamming the club against the minotaur’s head. Over and over, he continued to beat against the skull, cracks, and groans coming from the boss. It took the cold wave of power washing through him to

make Max stop, consumed by the anger he felt, knowing this beast was going to kill Tanila if given the chance.

[Consume has Successfully Consumed Bonus Stats]

[10 Strength Consumed]

[10 Constitution Consumed]

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Would you like to learn [Formidable Mind]?]

[Yes / No]

Without hesitation, Max selected yes. The pain in his mind immediately vanished, and the sudden rush of stats or skills no longer seemed to affect him like usual.

[Skill Description - Formidable Mind]

*****

Formidable Mind—Rare Skill: The user is extra resistant to skills, spells, and abilities that attempt to control or alter their mind. When under an effect, the user can decide to activate the ability, freeing them from it. The cooldown is twenty-four hours.

*****

That is not one I would have preferred you to have…

What does that mean? Because it will stop you?

A few seconds passed, and frustration seemed to come from within.

It may be more difficult for me to help you during those times when you need me. If you use that skill when I am in control, I can promise you it will go poorly for both of us.

How is that–

Focus on your group. We will talk later.

Glancing at the others, Max saw that Cordellia was staring at him, seemingly waiting for an answer.

“I’m sorry, what did you say?”

“I asked, what the hell is that weapon?!” their ranger asked loudly.

Realizing he still held the club in his hands, Max looked at it and grinned.

“I hadn’t checked.”

[*Inspect Weapon*]

*****

Burning Rage

+25 Strength, Constitution, Dexterity

Rage Fire Enchanted - Bonus fire damage dealt when angry. The more rage one has the hotter the flames will burn.

Bonded

*****

“How the hell is it bonded?”

“It’s bonded?” Fowl asked as the dwarf walked over to the warrior with the new flaming weapon. “That shouldn’t happen if you stole it from the boss.”

“Seriously?” Cordellia said as she approached the pair. “You’re telling me something that doesn’t seem to make sense like this bothers you? Have you forgotten that everything that happens to this group doesn’t make sense?”

Both men chuckled, and Max shrugged before putting the massive club away and then turned, seeing that the boss’s corpse was already gone.

“Damnit… I got distracted…”

“It’s okay,” Batrire said. “Fowl managed to get the leg you hacked off in his inventory. Who knows what that hoof might be worth?”

Chuckling, he nodded and turned to see Tanila looking at him. Her green eyes were locked on his face, and she mouthed the words *thank you* as she came closer.

“Oh please, before these two start kissing and making out, can we at least check the chest?” Fowl asked.

Smiling, Max winked at her and turned to the chest Fowl was about to make love to.

In the center of the room stood a massive chest, typical of bosses like this, the same color as the metal doors they had first entered through to get into this room. Along it were smaller minotaurs half the size of the massive one in the middle of the chest, covering each side all the way around.

“That thing wasn’t as big as I hoped,” Fowl said in an upset tone.

“I heard Batrire say the same thing,” Cordellia replied, earning a burst of laughter from everyone but the now red-faced dwarven warrior.

“Oh, I like her more every day,” their healer quickly added.

Ignoring the hand gesture Fowl made, the group moved to where the chest was at and glanced around at one another.

“Go for it, Cordellia, you earned it,” Tanaila declared, giving the ranger a wink.

Without waiting for Fowl to protest, the woman moved forward and gave the chest lid a shove, and grinned as she got to stare inside first.

Gathering around, they saw that three massive yellow gems were waiting for them, and one blank space had a rotating black box that needed to be rolled on.

“Why doesn’t an item show up?” Fowl asked as he glanced at the others. “Usually, it shows an idea of what the item is going to be.”

“And here I was worried you were going to be upset only one item was in here.”

“That is different, very rare,” their mage said as she tapped her bottom lip with a finger. It's usually not something one sees until floor thirty, maybe?”

“So, who rolls?” Fowl asked. “I mean… besides me?”

“I think we all should,” Batrire said as she watched the object continue to spin, not telling anyone what might be acquired.

With a nod from each party member, they all touched the space, and their faces appeared on what looked like a deck of cards. Suddenly, the cards were shuffled together, and they watched as each one was turned upside down, mixing and matching over and over.

Fowl let out a howl of joy when the top card turned over, and his face appeared.

“What the bloody hell is that?!” he shouted when a second card flipped over, and Cordellia’s was on it.

Over and over, more cards were flipped, the deck getting smaller and smaller as someone's face was shown on each card.

“It’s the last card,” Tanila said first. “That’s the winner.”

Trying to do the math on his fingers, Fowl started muttering, trying to remember how many cards had his image on them and how many he had seen.

“Does someone know?!” he asked as the pile reached down to just three cards left, and the cards seemed to turn over much slower now.

Max nodded but said nothing.

Three cards remained, and he knew who was still left in the game.

A card flipped over, showing Max and his bald head.

Trying not to flinch or wince, he waited, wondering if anyone else knew the count.

When the second to last card came, the sound of someone sucking in air through pursed lips only added to the suspense.

What felt like forever but was only a few seconds had a card with Cordellia’s face appear.

Groaning, the ranger sighed and looked at Max.

He nodded, and then the last card flipped over, revealing a bald head to everyone.

“That’s a shiny head,” Tanila stated. “Congrats.”

Fowl muttered a congratulations before turning and moving away from the chest.

“Flamin club and ….”

“Well, touch it!”

Nodding, he obeyed their healer, and Max put his hand in, touching the still-hidden item.

A green gem the size of his palm appeared, runes etched in it as it pulsed and glowed.

“That can’t be!” Cordellia shouted, moving closer to what Max was holding.

“It is!” Tanila said, her face mimicking the same open mouth and wide eyes as their ranger.

“What the hell is it?” Max asked as he looked between both women.

“It’s an escape gem!” exclaimed their mage. “It's very rare, very expensive, but super powerful. Had this boss been too much, or any boss really, you could break that gem, and it would take your entire party, dead or alive, and put them outside the entrance of the tower.”

“And there is no floor limit for it to work, or as far as I’ve heard,” Cordellia added. “Factions would pay tens of thousands of gold for an item like that.”

Scratching his chin with his other hand, Max shrugged and put it in storage.

“Well, hopefully, we won’t need it, but I doubt I’m ever going to sell it. Now then, where is the portal.”

Fowl grunted and pointed behind his balded-headed friend.

“Showed up after you won. I guess I can’t complain; that’s a nice get-out-of-a-bad-spot item.”

“Maybe if you’re nice, I’ll let you hold it,” Max teased.

“Who cares? I just want to go home and brag about hitting level fifty-five,” Fowl said with a wink.

Everyone laughed and nodded, glad to get to spend five more stat points.

Moving to where Tanila was, Max gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“I probably owe Fowl for saving you.”

Shaking her head, she rubbed his bald head and smiled.

“He wasn’t the one that took an attack for me. Thank you.”

Nodding, he grabbed her hand and led her toward the portal.

“You can thank me when we get back to the Faction house.”

Fowl groaned and quickly moved through the portal first.

197 - Tanila's Other Secret197 - Tanila's Other Secret - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

Consider giving Unhinged Fury a go.

- Weak to Strong LitRPG
- Unique premise. (Reincarnated, prior experience, in a competition for the future of humanity and weaponised luck)
- Single POV, well written and engaging.

Fowl returned the yellow band to Thomas and saw the man’s face as he did.

“It saved Tanila’s life, though. For that… I just wish I hadn’t had to use it so soon in our climb.”

Putting his hand on the dwarf’s shoulder, Tom gently squeezed and smiled.

“I used the other two for the same thing. That’s why you had it. Still, running into a boss with a way to remove taunt so early is… well, uncommon,” their trainer said before chuckling a moment. “Still, with you all, I shouldn’t be surprised by anything.”

Everett nodded as he dug through the desk, pulling out different drawers and then sliding them back in until he finally found the one he wanted.

A small box appeared in his hands, and he opened it, setting three potions Max recognized.

“I can give Tanila, Batrire, and Cordellia each one of these, but if you want a weaker version, go buy one from the Faction shop. These three, however, are far beyond all those things. Outside of a boss from the fortieth level, they should stop any one attack.”

“Why would you give us one of those?”

The older man closed the box and put it back in the dimensional storage of the drawer.

“I owe Seth for introducing me to someone. Let’s just say this should cover that fee.”

Fowl glanced at his friend and gave a single head nod.

“I’ll tell you later,” he muttered.

“Now, two more floors until you reach the first real tower boss. Any thoughts?”

Everyone looked at Tom and shook their heads.

“We still need to get there first,” Tanila replied. “Our biggest need right now is to let a few cooldowns of our abilities end and then move to the next floor.”

Everyone nodded, and since no one seemed interested in saying anything else, Everett excused all of them except Seth.

“How bad was that boss?” Tom asked. “I could see it in Tanila’s eyes and on Fowl’s face.”

“For a moment, we all thought she was going to die,” he replied, his voice lower than usual. “It was so angry, and its weapon was massive. She couldn’t dodge if she had wanted.”

Everett watched the two men talk, waiting till Tom was done with his questions.

“Is it my turn?” the faction leader finally asked when both men were looking at him.

“He’s all yours,” Tom replied, stretching on the couch.

Nodding, Everett pulled the sword Max had made for them and set it on the table.

Forcing his eyes to go wide and leaning upon being surprised at the man showing him the weapon, Max let out a whistle.

“Is that mine?”

Both men laughed and shook their heads, seemingly amused by that question.

“No! That weapon is far beyond what you should have, but that is why I gave your team those potions. Would you like to inspect it?”

Raising an eyebrow, Max watched both their faces and then nodded.

He grabbed the sword by the handle, feeling the weight he remembered, and pretended to examine the blade for a moment. Giving it a quick thrust, he smiled and then finally examined it for himself.

[*Inspect Weapon*]

*****

Crafted Legendary Sword

+75 Strength, Dexterity

Fire Enchanted - Bonus Fire Damage

Lightning Enchanted - Bonus Lightning Damage

*****

It was his turn to have his mouth almost hit the floor when he realized the stats of what he had created.

“Is… this says seventy-five to two stats,” Max said quietly. “How?”

Both men snorted, and Everett leaned over, holding out his hands and waiting for Max to finally give back the sword.

“The crafter you sent us, Joshua, he made this. Even our old crafter was skilled, but with two affinities, the stats were so much higher. This item right here,” Everett said as he gave it a swing while talking, “could mean the difference between life and death for so many.”

Sighing, Max nodded, realizing now the true potential of what he could create.

“Well… now I feel like I should have asked more questions from him and begged for an item. Though I’m glad he has helped the Faction and apparently made you two happy.”

Tom was still grinning, even though he wasn’t holding the sword. The older man’s eyes never left it until Everett put it away.

“What I wouldn’t have given for a pair of those back in the day.”

Everett nodded and turned his attention back to Max, who was grinning just as much as they were.

“Do you or anyone else in your party need a new weapon? I’m not sure when I can get one made, but I feel it would be a worthwhile investment.”

Frowning, Max wasn’t sure how to answer that question.

On one hand, if they gave Fowl or him a sword or mace or heck any weapon with stats like that, it would be a major boost in their ability to kill things. Yet doing so might also ruin them when real problems hit.

“Is it ok if I say no?”

Both men gave him a confused look.

“I mean, that sounds amazing, but what happens if the sword breaks or we somehow are somewhere that weapon can’t be used? Wouldn’t we be so dependent upon it that we might actually be in a worse position when it's gone?”

“Damn, he’s smarter than both of us,” Tom replied with a snort. “Here we were, trying to help him out, and he reminded us why we don’t give starting adventurers really nice equipment.”

Everett bobbed his head, his eyes still blinking rapidly at the knowledge Max was correct and had just turned down a potentially mythic or legendary item.

“Cordellia still doing good?”

“Good change of the subject,” Max said with a wink at the Faction leader. “She is a great asset, and I think she is finally finding her place. Just today, she said something that had all of us laughing… well, everyone except Fowl. I’m not certain you could have picked a better person for us.”

Both men seemed relieved, their shoulders relaxing a little as they sat across the table from him on those soft couches.

“Plans? Track down more killers? Has someone attempted to assassinate you?”

Groaning, Max shook his head.

“Tanila and I plan on staying here for the next few days. If we do go out, we’ll be careful and travel by carriage.”

“Good. One last question then,” Tom said. “How serious are things with you and Tanila? I know that seems like a weird question, but we do have a room that is a little nicer if you two prefer.”

Chuckling, Max shook his head.

“Maybe later. I’ll mention it, and if she says yes, then it's okay, but for now, I’m fine where we are.”

Nodding, Tom stood up and shook hands as Max prepared to leave.

“Be safe, have fun, and don’t go causing any more trouble.”

Nodding, Max moved out the open door, ready to go see Tanila.

Out of breath, Max lay there and chuckled.

“I can run for days, but fifteen minutes seems to wear me out.”

Groaning, Tanila laughed from the other side of the room, getting a few cups of water.

“You’re not planning on leaving me and crafting, are you?”

Shaking his head, Max smiled as she came back with the cups.

“No, but I turned down us getting items that *Joshua* makes. Both were surprised, yet if we ended up with a fifty or something in our stats, I’m certain it would make us forget how hard things really are.”

Sighing, Tanila nodded and then took a drink, her green eyes watching Max the whole time.

“So the guy who literally has the easiest way to get stronger doesn’t want to skip ahead?”

Nodding, Max tapped his temple and grinned.

“So let’s compare stats if you want. No items except that bracelet of yours.”

Tanila studied Max and then nodded slowly.

“Why do I feel like I’m not going to like this game?”

[Simple Base Stat Check]

*****

Max Hoste

18-Year-old Human Male

Level 1

Exp 46/1000

Tower Experience: 6.11%

HP: 1630/1630

MP: 1070/1070

Stamina: 34/815

STR: 163

DEX: 150

CON: 163

INT: 107

WIS: 107

Defense of the Dragon - 3.0%

Defense of the Demon - 3.0%

Demon Essence: - 313

*****

“Now it's your turn.”

Sighing, she nodded and grimaced.

“Twenty, Twenty, forty, one hundred-twenty-one and sixty.”

Max had not realized just the difference between their stats. Without items or equipment, only her intelligence was higher than his.”

“I can see that look in your eyes,” she groaned. “You’re doing the math and realized just how broken you really are.”

“Fowls are basically the same except swapped out,” Max said, getting a nod from her. “Which is why–”

“You dodge everything, hit harder than anyone, and can take just as much damage almost as Fowl,” she explained, cutting him off. “Your spells were nearing the damage mine did without my familiar to help me out. Based on the number of points you have, you are over level one hundred and fifty, meaning by the time we hit the fiftieth floor, you will have outscaled everyone.”

“Yet the monsters are still stronger and hit harder than I do,” Max replied.

“Which only means that at the pace the tower monsters continue to grow, you’ll be even further ahead. You’ll be…” Tanila paused, biting her lip just a tad as she winced. “Just like a god.”

She put her finger on his lips when Max started to protest and shook her head.

“I know, don’t complain. Something tells me you’re going to need it. Besides that book of yours, you keep and the stats you mark down for each monster, be honest when you answer this question. How would a normal team of five handle what we did today?”

Grimacing, Max couldn’t help but remember how Cordellia had acted the first time they stood outside the fifth-floor boss. That fear and realization she could die at any moment from a wayward hit sunk in.

“How do the others do it? The ones that are like Dexis, making a run for the fiftieth floor?”

Tapping her chin, Tanila knew the answer but wasn’t sure everything about it was true.

“Next time you talk to Everett, ask him about her group. See if he will share the number of skills they have and how it is they continue to make it through the tower. If I’m right, they are basically geared to the max, each having begun with multiple skills from the day they first touched the skill crystal.

“My parents do it by keeping a higher level team rotating through the tower, helping lower level and weaker ones grow stronger. Like the weapon you fear, there is a shortcut. They often have to go back to lower levels, fighting stuff they are stronger than, just to learn the needed tactics. You could accept items from Everett, speeding up our trip through the tower, and just know that eventually, we would need to return to the lower ones, earning back the skill and tactics we are missing.”

“You think we are missing tactics? Outside of today we–”

“I almost died.”

Her words stopped Max in his tracks. She was right.

“How could we have prevented that, though? Everett said the boss had a skill not usually seen until level thirty?!”

Shrugging, Tanila lay on the bed, setting her cup on the middle of her chest and staring at the paneled ceiling.

“I’m fine taking things slow. Just look at how long it took us to get together.”

Groaning, Max saw her smirk and leaned over, kissing her before sitting up and finishing his water.

“It’s a good thing my stamina hasn’t fully recovered yet, or I’d do something,” he teased, rolling off the side of the bed and moving to where his pants were resting on the back of a chair.

“What are you about to do?” she asked, sitting up and frowning.

Setting the cup down and holding his hands up in the air, he waved in surrender.

“Just getting some food. I’m not sure, but I could swear the stomach that growled earlier wasn’t mine.

A pillow was tossed at him, and Max caught it, sending it back at her, and then grabbed his pants, quickly sliding his legs into them.

“You know… if you put the necklace on, stored the pants, and then just had them equipped with all the rest of your clothes, things would go faster, and I wouldn’t lay here wasting away.”

Laughing, Max did as she said, quickly losing all his pants, giving a quick shake, and then equipping all of his clothes again.

“One day, I may forget how actually to put clothes on if I keep doing this,” he said, moving toward the door. “Be back in a couple.”

When the door shut, Tanila grimaced and pulled up her stat sheet.

[Simple Base Stat Check]

*****

Tanila Gilmenor

73-Year-old Elf Female

Level 55

Exp 175,466 / 2,196,231,656

Tower Experience: 6.13%

HP: 400/400

MP: 1210/1210

Stamina: 57/200

STR: *20*

DEX: *20*

CON: *40*

INT: *121*

WIS: *60*

Defense of the Dragon - 3.0%

Defense of the Demon - 3.0%

Royalty Suppressed

*****

Waving a hand over her bracelet, it appeared, and with a simple gesture, the room began to light up as she began to radiate with power.

[Simple Base Stat Check]

*****

Tanila Gilmenor

73-Year-old Elf Female

Level 55

Exp 175,466 / 2,196,231,656

Tower Experience: 6.13%

HP: 800/800

MP: 2420/2420

Stamina: 57/400

STR: 40

DEX: 40

CON: 80

INT: 242

WIS: 120

Defense of the Dragon - 3.0%

Defense of the Demon - 3.0%

Blood of the Elven Line 2x to all Stats

*****

Seeing those numbers made her feel slightly better, but the truth was that she couldn’t reveal herself yet. When the time came, she would, but until then, she knew what it was like to limit her true potential.

With a wave of her hand, the glow in the room vanished, and she felt her power diminish drastically.

198 - Fairies, Sprites and Ents[198 - Fairies, Sprites and Ents - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/89798/mage-from-a-magicless-world

Mage from a magicless world

Don't mourn Ryder's passing just yet. His journey didn't end with his death; it didn't even slow him down much. Aided by a mysterious entity with its own inscrutable agenda, he now finds himself in Galassia—a realm of magic and intrigue ruled by ancient mages of immense power and longevity.

In this unfamiliar world, Ryder lacks status or power. Yet armed only with his razor-sharp wit and reckless courage, he refuses to be sidelined. Past experience tells him that powerlessness is just a temporary state, one he aims to rectify. With the lives of those he comes to care for hanging in the balance, Ryder Corvo is poised to rewrite his legend once again.

What to expect:

-Fellow earthling in another world

-Magic/Western fantasy

-A slight nod at cultivation/Eastern fiction

-Some tropes embraced, others subverted

You should give this series a read if:

-You enjoy isekai/magic fantasy stories

Chapter release schedule: (probably) 5 a week, mon-fri,

Though I intend to keep releasing chapters even though weekends until story gets going a little.

(please don't take it as a promise, it's a declaration of intention, plenty of work goes into fighting with my old writing)

“Does this remind you of home?” Fowl asked as he glanced at the two elves, giving him a dirty look.

“Why would a forest *remind* us of home?” Tanila replied. “Do rocks remind you of your home?”

Nodding, Fowl grinned, pulling a stone from his storage and holding it out.

“This is why I carry them. To remind me of where I’m from.”

Groaning, Batrire shook her head, rolling her eyes.

“Ignore him. He’s an idiot.”

“But I’m your idiot,” he shot back, winking at her.

Max came toward the group, having gone and scouted a bit ahead.

“So the bad news is I’m going to have to use a bow,” he told them. “The good news is I think Cordellia will be our hero on this floor.”

“What is it?” their ranger asked, grinning at the chance to do more.

“It appears some of the trees are alive, and hanging out in the top of them are… faeries? Sprites? I’m not sure, but they have wings and are in different colors.”

Both elves shared a secret glance, and each groaned slightly.

“That means they are casters, and the tree is their defense,” Tanila said as she summoned a fire familiar. “We probably won't want to burn the forest down, but that kind of magic is the best here, especially against the Tree Ents.”

“That means I don’t get to play with my new toy,” Max said as he pulled his bow out. A quiver of arrows came next, and he attached it to his hip, smiling at Cordellia, who was frowning.

“I swear, if you somehow show me up with that, I’ll probably just do what Batrire does and stand around all day.”

Fowl snorted, sending a spray of water out his nose from the drink he had been taking before they started.

“Sorry, only one of us can slack,” their healer replied. It's a perk of the profession.”

Snapping his fingers and ignoring the dirty looks he got, Max pointed at the trees and frowned.

“We need to focus. The trees are tightly packed, and we’ll need to go slow. I’m not sure how many are in there or how far we will travel. You all know I like to joke and play, but today… let’s be a little smarter.”

Everyone nodded, knowing he was acting this way after what almost happened in the last dungeon.

Before them were trees of various heights. Some were only fifty feet tall, while others ran three hundred feet tall. Massive trunks, skinny trunks, bark that could easily be pulled off, and bark that looked almost like scale armor.

Shrubs and plants decorated the ground, making Max wonder if some were worth gathering and seeing if they could be used for alchemy or something else.

Moss grew on some trees and not on others, and the sound of birds high in the trees made everything feel alive. Even the air smelled better than that of the city.

“Warrior first,” Max teased as he stood near the other three, holding out a bow.

“Shouldn’t the one with your ability be leading? You can scout better than I can,” grumbled Fowl.

“At some point, you need to be good enough at this. Who knows what a later tower floor will bring.”

Not saying another word, the plate armor appeared on Fowl, and he began moving toward the trees, glancing upward as he walked and trying to scan the area.

“We taking bets on how he does?” Batrire whispered.

“Only if I can bet how bad it goes,” Cordellia replied.

“Three are flying around on top of that ent over there,” Fowl said as he pointed at the tree, which was about fifty feet tall. “What do we want to do?”

Every image Max had ever had of fairies was before him: barely dressed creatures, long hair, shimmering wings—well, except for the eyes that seemed to burn with fire and the small pair of horns jutting out of their hair.

“Those aren’t fairies,” Tanila said. “Those are fae creatures and a version of a dryad, though they shouldn’t have wings.”

“Which means the tower has corrupted whatever they are,” Cordellia added.

Pointing at the two fae creatures filtering around the branches, Tanila continued her lesson.

“The red one should use fire, and that blue one should use ice, but since we don’t know how corrupt they are, it’s anyone's guess. I'm guessing that the dryad should be able to heal and cast root spells, plus other things. In the end, this is going to suck.”

“Can we run past them?”

“Sorry dear, I’m not fast like Seth, so no, I’m not going to run around the forest, trying not to die while trees and those things try to stomp on me or hit me with spells.”

A snicker came from their healer, and she winked.

“Tanila, focus on the blue one. I’ll take the fire one, and Cordellia can attack the dryad.”

The other two nodded at Max and got ready, motioning to Fowl that they were about to start.

Arrows began to fly, Cordellia giving Max a sideways glance as he kept up with her output, putting arrow after arrow into his target.

A weird roar or scream came from the ent that started to move toward them. A black crooked mouth with teeth made out of wood continued sending sound in their direction, causing a slight pain in their heads.

“My noggin is killing me,” Fowl complained as he moved toward the slow, lumbering creature.

Flames erupted in the branches of the tree after impacting the blue fae creature.

Max couldn’t help but smile, imagining what one might think when they saw the sight before him.

A tree moving through the forest, flames racing up its branches, winged creatures screaming in agony and pain before falling from that height and crashing into the ground.

Once the one he had been aiming at hit the dirt, a small wave of cold ran through him.

[Consume has Successfully Consumed Bonus Stats]

[10 Intelligence Consumed]

[10 Wisdom Consumed]

[Consume has Consumed a Lower Rank Skill]

[Power stored for future use]

Seeing that Cordellia’s target was down and that the one Tanila was fighting was falling, Max released an arrow, hitting the falling creature in the neck a few feet before it crashed against the forest's dirt floor.

Another cold wave washed through him, and he grinned.

[8 Intelligence Consumed]

[8 Wisdom Consumed]

[Consume has Consumed a Lower Rank Skill]

[Power stored for future use]

When all three of the fae were dead on the ground, the ent that hadn’t reached Fowl yet began to roar and shudder. Still about twenty yards from the dwarf, it began shaking, and branches still burning broke off and fell to the ground near its roots.

“Uh guys?” Fowl said as he started backing up.

Cracks formed along its trunk, and Max and Tanila both cast a wall of air around everyone.

Seven seconds later, an explosion rang out through the forest as the tree burst apart from the inside, sending wooden chunks flying, impaling all over the ground, into trees, and bouncing off the walls of air and Fowl's shield he was hiding behind.

A weird stench filled the air, and Fowl peeked out over the edge, seeing that the only thing left from the massive ent was the remains around the forest, dripping with a green sap.

"Yeah… I'm not touching that," Fowl muttered. "Worse is those bodies are basically gone, smashed and burnt to bits."

Max couldn't help but snort and nod.

"Ok, tell me what the hell is going on," Cordellia belted out, moving to get right up against Max. "I don't mind watching you destroy things with every kind of melee weapon and taking hits that will kill all of us but that tiny dwarf, but how can you shoot a bow almost as good as I can?"

Max sighed and tried to decide what to tell her.

Cordellia seemed trustworthy so far. Everett and Tom appeared not to have any idea about the loot or the other nature of their party. That elixir had made her see this group's value, yet this was obviously a sensitive subject.

"Do you want the truth, or do you want me to tell you, it's not time for that secret yet?"

She opened and closed her mouth, her cheeks moving like a chipmunk stuffed with nuts as they ballooned and shrunk over and over. Finally, after letting out a loud groan, she pointed a finger at him.

"So you're saying that there is a day you will tell me!"

Max nodded, slowly reaching upward with his hand and putting it on her shoulder.

"I promise. There will be a day when you will know my secret. That day will come when I know for certain that I can protect you."

Her eyebrow raised, and she frowned.

"Why would you need to protect me?"

"Because there are people trying to kill me," Max replied, "and not just the fanatics."

Cordellia glanced at the others and saw each of them nodding.

"You're serious. Just how dangerous is it?"

Shaking his head side to side, Max considered that question and shrugged.

"You could leave our group, and most likely, you should be safe. I can't promise someone won't approach you or even kidnap you trying to get information about me. The problem is if you're not with us, I can't try to protect you. The real perk is being with us makes it harder for someone to hurt you. As we progress, you get stronger,

and I know you have gained more power in the time you have been with us than you did for months, maybe even half a year."

Nodding slowly, Cordellia sighed and fidgeted.

"It just sucks that I thought I was going to show off and you could do the same things."

Shaking his head, Max smiled and squeezed the shoulder before taking his hand off.

"I didn't use a bow skill, did I? That's your stuff. Right now, you have taken out a third of what we faced. Soon enough, you'll see just how important you are."

"Fine," she replied. "Just try not to make me look too bad."

"I promise. Now, let's let our scout find us something else to fight and hopefully the end of this tower floor."

Fowl banged his weapon against his shield and turned, not waiting for everyone else as he pretended to stalk quietly through the forest in full plate armor.

Over fifty ents had blown up, and almost two hundred fae were dead. The occasional ent had four or five at the top of their protector. In those moments, Cordellia showed off her talent, using skills and killing some outright.

Max hadn't mentioned to Tanila yet that he continued to get notifications about storing power, and each of these fae he killed had a weaker spell he imagined, which had to be the elemental affinity he killed.

I wonder what she'll do when I tell her my intelligence and wisdom are now one hundred and forty three?

Fowl was leading them through the forest, and no creatures had been spotted for the last five or six minutes.

A loud roar and explosion erupted from deeper in the woods, and everyone quickly looked at each other.

"Another team!" Cordellia said quickly.

"What do we do?"

She glanced at Fowl and shrugged.

"Honestly, it's best to go and show yourself to them. No one wants to be thought of as sneaky or hiding from the other without cause. Doing so can sometimes lead to people being on edge, and that is how fights break out."

Tanila nodded and so they followed Fowl through the forest in the direction of the noise they had heard.

"Hello!" Fowl shouted when the group of five elves appeared between the trees. "We heard you and came to check if you are okay!"

Everyone had their weapon put away, and Tanila had let her familiar go. They were doing what they could to appear friendly and not ready for a fight.

The elves jumped up, weapons out, watching Max and the others come through the trees.

Two male and three female elves gave glances that didn't look very nice as they studied the team.

"Two mages, a ranger, one tank, and a healer," Tanila whispered. "The healer is the leader."

Max didn't ask, wondering how she could tell but as he studied the group, he saw the woman's lips moving, no one else was speaking just her.

"We do not need help, but thank you for letting us know you are here," said the female elf, who wore robes and carried a staff similar to that of a healer. Can I assume you wish to talk, or are you seeking to journey with another group?"

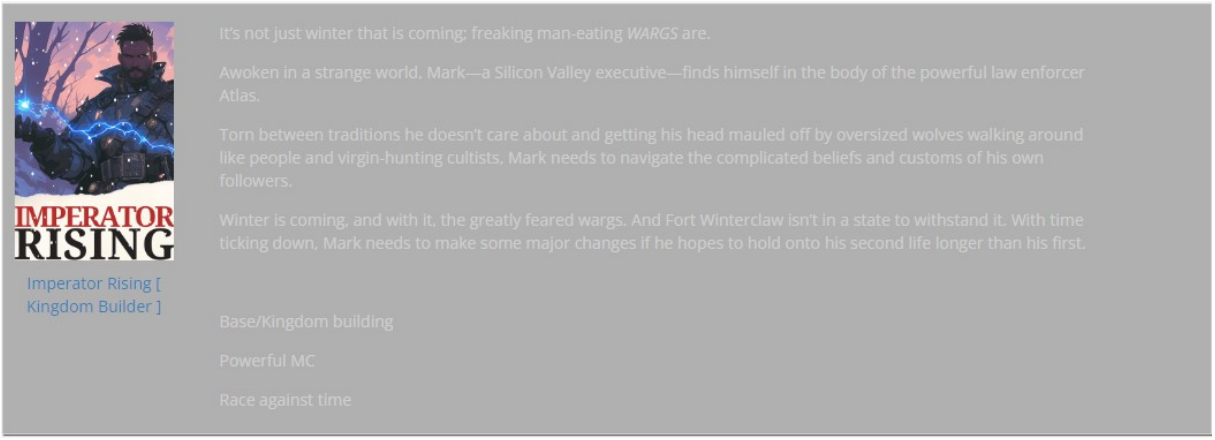
Fowl glanced at Cordellia, unsure of how to reply.

"I guess we didn't discuss that."

199 - The Power of Your Name[199 - The Power of Your Name - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/90172/imperator-rising-kingdom-builder


IMPERATOR
RISING
Imperator Rising [Kingdom Builder]
It's not just winter that is coming; freaking man-eating *WARGS* are.
Awoken in a strange world, Mark—a Silicon Valley executive—finds himself in the body of the powerful law enforcer Atlas.
Torn between traditions he doesn't care about and getting his head mauled off by oversized wolves walking around like people and virgin-hunting cultists, Mark needs to navigate the complicated beliefs and customs of his own followers.
Winter is coming, and with it, the greatly feared wargs. And Fort Winterclaw isn't in a state to withstand it. With time ticking down, Mark needs to make some major changes if he hopes to hold onto his second life longer than his first.
Base/Kingdom building
Powerful MC
Race against time

"You are the first group we've encountered," Max told the elves as they drew closer. "We are part of the Golden Axe Faction. This is Fowl, our main warrior. Batrire, our healer; Tanila, our mage; Cordellia, our ranger, and I have a bow as well."

"And you are?" the healer asked.

"Seth Pendal."

Both mages and their warrior frowned and narrowed their eyes, but the healer simply nodded.

“We are from the Enlightened Souls Faction,” the woman said, giving a small bow. “I am Ikkanya. This is Klaern, our warrior, and Lorsan, our archer. Rainelius and Finnea are our mages. Tell me, do you wish to abide by the Tower pact?”

“We do,” Tanila replied, moving to stand next to Max. “We can party if you desire, help if needed, or we can change our direction and seek to exit ourselves.”

Ikkanya’s eyebrow fluttered just barely for a moment at Tanila’s words.

“You’re not here to farm experience?”

Shaking her head, Tanila smiled.

“We are just passing through. While the experience is good, this place isn’t much of a threat.”

Max wasn’t sure what Tanila was doing, but he kept silent. His eyes watched each of the elves, noticing their slight ticks at every word she spoke.

“I see,” Ikkanya replied. “Well, then I guess we would best be served to go our own way as we are after experience. Finding the portal to leave would only cut that short. Do you have an idea which direction you will head?”

Tanila’s voice was different and it became apparent she wasn’t happy with how the healer was speaking. Gone was the softness he had grown accustomed to. Now, it was edgy and almost felt like borderline threatening.

“We’ll move back to where we were, far enough away we could hear your ent explode, and stay to the south of you. Perhaps we shall find the edge of the floor and follow it around.”

Giving a slight nod of her head, Ikkanya made a gesture with her hands, and all the elves at her party copied it. Tanila and Cordellia likewise made the same motion.

“I wish you and yours a safe journey. May you be blessed by the blood of our king.”

Tanila nodded and turned, motioning for the rest to join her.

Fowl took the lead as they walked, and Max was grateful for the sonar range as he focused as much as possible on the group they were walking away from. He could hear Tanila’s heart beating fast and knew she wasn’t happy.

“We need to go and fast,” Tanila said as she whirled around, making sure no one was following her.

“She’s right. They are not fans of you, Seth. How they reacted when you said your name made me think a fight might break out.”

“I did pick up that they weren’t happy to meet me. Think they are zealots?”

Frowning, Tanila shook her head.

“If they were, I doubt we would have gotten far before a few spells were sent our way. However, that does not mean they might not consider a few other actions. They could attack us from behind, hoping to earn points with those who are in the Faction and part of that group. They might leave, going to tell the same people in the faction where we are, giving them a chance to possibly find us in here and kill us without witnesses. Or they may just continue hunting, eventually carrying back information about us to the others.”

The scowl on her face ruined her beauty, but Max wasn’t sure how they were supposed to respond.

“We need to hunt and move fast,” Cordellia said during the moment of silence. We zig-zag and sometimes keep zigging, working in the southwest direction. That is our best chance to find the portal at some point and reduce the risk of being followed.”

“Except for the damn noise,” Fowl muttered. “Any way to prevent that?”

“Kill the ent first, I’m guessing, before all the fae die. Otherwise, no.”

Tanila nodded that Max’s guess was most likely right.

“Then we move,” Fowl said, turning quickly and holding his shield and weapon ready.

Even when they were tired and felt a break was needed, no one really relaxed. It took almost seven more hours before they found the exit, and upon taking it, they finally felt a breath of relief.

Once in the carriage on the way back to the Faction, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

“I haven’t been that tense in a long time,” Cordellia said. “Don’t get me wrong, I love my people, but some of them have huge sticks up their arse.”

“Don’t feel bad. There are just as many dwarves with boots up their arses as elves with trees up theirs,” Fowl stated.

“I didn’t say trees!”

“No, but you should have,” replied their resident joker.

Groaning, Cordellia turned her attention away from the dwarf she was sitting next to. She stared at the wall of the carriage for a moment before getting bored and returning her attention to the others.

“Tomorrow, we can do the next level since we didn’t use any high cooldowns. The experience was ok, but the gems were way low.”

Their range snorted, shaking her head at Max as she pulled a sack of yellow gems out and set it on her lap.

“One of these might have been filled with a normal group, but I believe we have three.”

Sheepishly grinning, Max bobbed his head. “Perhaps I was comparing it to the last floor of the tower.”

“Or the werewolf one!” Fowl exclaimed.

Max felt Tanila’s head leaning against his shoulder, and her hand reached out and grabbed his.

“Sorry,” she muttered quietly. “I wasn’t going to stand there and let her talk to us like that.”

“She was very rude indeed!”

Max looked at Cordellia, who had agreed with Tanila, and thought back to that moment.

“The tone of her voice?”

“Yes! It was awful. I had half a mind to–” Tanila caught herself and stopped. “No… that wouldn’t have been good. I’m just glad it appears we made it out of there without any problems.”

No one wanted to chat much, and after a quick meal, everyone retired to their rooms.

Max resisted the urge to ask questions but it was obvious Tanila was upset about the exchange of words she had with the elven healer. The whole race was a weird bunch to understand but it made sense. Not every human was kind or enjoyed a good laugh. Some could be just as much of an arse as the next. It bothered him when he saw people treating others disrespectfully and the memory of the arena often played out in his head, knowing the queens were commanding people like.

Dwarves had their own moments, causing problems, while others were jovial all the time.

“I love you.”

Tanila rolled over and looked at Max. She saw his small smile, and his eyes focused on her.

“I know,” she replied with a wink before moving closer and kissing him.

“Go to sleep. Tomorrow is going to be another day, and the good news is I will get to spend it with you.”

Reaching out, she stroked his cheek and couldn’t help but smile when he ran his fingers through her unbraided hair. Knowing he liked it that way, played with it, and occasionally brushed it for her was one of the joys she never truly told him how much it meant.

“Are you always this happy? I mean, every day, you seem ready to risk death and face the unknown. How do you do it?”

Moving his hand, Max used the back of his finger, gently stroking her cheek.

“Because, as I just told you, I get to do it with you. In case you’ve missed it, since joining this part, I’ve been extremely happy, and we both know it’s not because of Fowl.”

Unable to help herself, Tanila laughed, letting go of the angst of that day, and smiled as Max had her roll over and pulled her close.

“Sleep. Tomorrow will be a better day.”

“Gods, I want to beat you,” Tanila said as she finally was able to stop coughing.

A huge green cloud of poison surrounded them, and none of her spells could stop the potions the snakemen threw at them.

Using a shield or wall only caused it to break higher, somehow still tracking the original target.

“What did I do?” Max asked as he hacked off a few tails from the nine-foot-tall creatures. They were longer than that, but their hooded face was wide with scales and two massive yellow eyes when standing upright. They were faster than expected, and each carried two swords.

“I remember you saying last night ‘Tomorrow will be a better day,’ but somehow this doesn’t seem better than yesterday!”

Cordellia grunted in agreement as the three of them all stood there, scratching their skin furiously. Fowl had long stopped complaining. His armor could come off instantly, but he knew the dangers of starting to scratch.

“I’m not sure I can be blamed for the tower giving us these creatures to fight,” Max replied. “I mean giant snake men with dimensional storage and potions of itchy poison?”

Batrire glared at Max and again took the time, starting with herself to cure the poison.

“The worst is having to wait for this cloud to disappear. Do you have any idea how hard it is to cast when you can’t stop scratching yourself?”

Saying nothing, Max turned and continued harvesting the snakes for parts.

“You know the real secret?” Fowl whispered as he handed Max a tail. “Just imagine how bad your balls once itched, and none of the rest really matters.”

Shaking his head, Max couldn’t help but smack his mouth and almost gag.

“I really could have done without that knowledge.”

“Hey! You try walking around in a suit of metal armor every day, all day. Stuff sweats.”

Holding his hand up for Fowl to stop talking, he saw his friend grinning, knowing it would only get worse.

“The good news is they aren’t that strong.”

With the itching gone, a sigh came from the back three, and Max smiled and turned, pointing at the large structure across the sand.

The tower floor was a massive area filled with sand that was flat with no rises like the other one. Heat waves radiated off it, and Fowl and Max continually swapped out their armor for much lighter and more breathable equipment before each fight. With his sonar skill, nothing but the snakes were here, and even in the packs of six or seven, Cordellia and he could kill two usually before they made it to the group while Tanila took out another. Before the close range combat took place, the fight was already decided.

The three women stood near the ice familiar, thankful for the cold emanating from it.

“How much further do you think we have?” Fowl asked as he sipped from his water supply.

“Two? Three hours?”

Groaning, the dwarf spilled some of the water over his head and sighed.

“It’s been almost four hours, and I feel like I’m baking.”

“Then we better hurry,” Max said, pulling a bow out and moving toward the object far away.

No boss was in sight as they approached the large stone pyramid. Massive steps, each three feet tall, led to the top of the three hundred-foot-tall object. Everyone groaned and complained as they made their way up carefully, unsure if a trap might spring or monsters might suddenly appear.

When everyone was covered in sweat and praying never to see a staircase again, they reached the top, breaking out in a cheer as the portal waited about ten feet from the last step.

Making sure no traps were around, Max motioned for everyone to hurry up and go through the portal.

Sitting in the carriage, Tanila kept the ice familiar out, filling the space with a coolness that everyone found heavenly.

“Now that I know we can do this, we’ll need a bigger coach soon, so we don’t have to worry about someone bumping into this thing and getting hurt.”

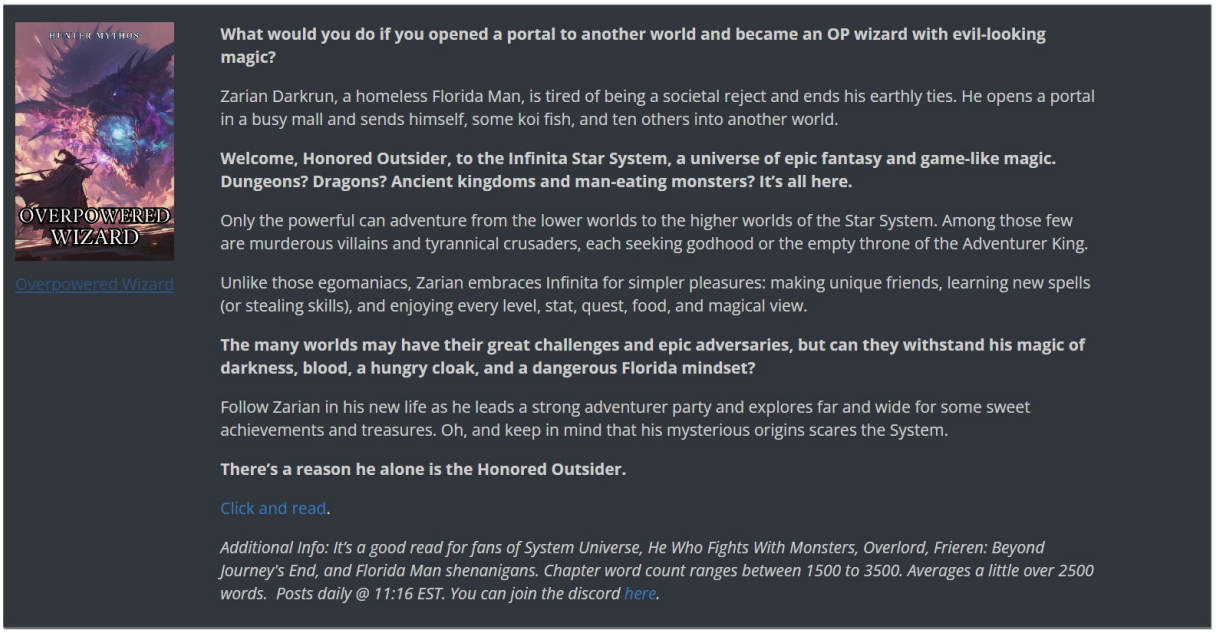
Max nodded at their mage's words, keeping his eyes closed and enjoying the cold. He had no idea how long it had been since all he could think about was wanting to strip off his clothes and sit in a tub of cold water.

“You know the best thing?” Max asked, not bothering to wait or open his eyes. “Tomorrow, we face the next tower boss.”

200 - Training With Tom[200 - Training With Tom - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/90220/overpowered-wizard


HUNTER MYTHOS
OVERPOWERED WIZARD
Overpowered Wizard
What would you do if you opened a portal to another world and became an OP wizard with evil-looking magic?
Zarian Darkrun, a homeless Florida Man, is tired of being a societal reject and ends his earthly ties. He opens a portal in a busy mall and sends himself, some koi fish, and ten others into another world.
Welcome, Honored Outsider, to the Infinita Star System, a universe of epic fantasy and game-like magic. Dungeons? Dragons? Ancient kingdoms and man-eating monsters? It's all here.
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The many worlds may have their great challenges and epic adversaries, but can they withstand his magic of darkness, blood, a hungry cloak, and a dangerous Florida mindset?
Follow Zarian in his new life as he leads a strong adventurer party and explores far and wide for some sweet achievements and treasures. Oh, and keep in mind that his mysterious origins scares the System.
There's a reason he alone is the Honored Outsider.
Click and read.
Additional Info: It's a good read for fans of System Universe, He Who Fights With Monsters, Overlord, Frieren: Beyond Journey's End, and Florida Man shenanigans. Chapter word count ranges between 1500 to 3500. Averages a little over 2500 words. Posts daily @ 11:16 EST. You can join the discord here.

“I don’t miss those tower floors,” Tom said as everyone sat at a table in the Faction dining area.

Eight massive tables with benches lined one section, while two long tables reserved for special events were pushed off at the far end, surrounded by fancy chairs.

Their trainer picked at a few pieces of meat while everyone else continued devouring the spiced meat over rice. Fresh fruit was stacked in bowls near them, and a server came by occasionally, offering more food or drink as needed.

“Once, I had sunburns so bad my skin peeled for a week. The worst was my choice to walk along that desert in armor or clothes, neither being a good choice. Afterward, I started carrying an enchanted hooded cloak that helped in those places. It was so worth the money.”

Max glanced at everyone else, seeing they had stopped eating their food and were now drooling at the thought of a cloak like that.

“How do we get one of those?” Batrire asked.

Chuckling, Tom grinned as everyone waited to hear his answer.

“You can buy them from the Faction shop just like everything else. I asked around, and it appears none of you have spent any time browsing the lists.”

Max sighed and felt Tanila’s eyes boring into the side of his head.

“Is that so?” their mage asked, her tone flat as she spoke. “Someone had mentioned they had gone to the Faction store and found nothing of value.”

Coughing, Max cleared his throat, swallowing the bite of food that had gotten lodged in it and took a long drink of the ale in his mug.

“I may not have spent as much time looking as I should have,” Max replied. “Perhaps I was a little overzealous in my desire just to keep climbing the tower.”

Tom laughed and rapped the table with his knuckles.

“This is why I mentioned it. You five are about to face the next boss in the tower, and having gotten there so fast, the real question I need to ask is, are you as prepared as possible? Have you restocked your potions? Kept up to date on any new items that might upgrade what you have? Considered purchasing or borrowing the rings we have? Also, I’ve noticed none of you have really trained as much as you should have when you were not in the tower.”

Sighing, Tom focused his gaze on each of the team members, starting with Fowl and working his way till he locked eyes with Max.

“You don’t have to go into the tower day after day. I know the rush. I know the thrill. It is exhilarating as you power through it. But when that first big wall comes, and things go sideways, wouldn’t a few extra days or weeks of training with myself or others that have already fought inside be helpful?”

Max started to talk, but Tom cut him off with a raised hand.

“Tanila, how much time have you spent working on the things we started doing with your spells?”

Frowning, their mage shook her head.

“Not as much as I should be. Those lessons were very helpful.”

“And Batrire, are you healing as efficiently as possible? Do you practice the rotation and timing? Can you do it with your eyes closed? Also, don’t forget, that we talked about gauging damage about to be done and having the heal finish casting right as it does. That way, you can save a second or three off the cooldown in case it needs to be used again.”

Their trainer turned, looking at Cordellia, who winced as his eyes landed on her.

“You should be telling them to train. How many hours have we spent shooting arrows and making small changes, knowing they all add up to better shots and more damage?”

“Thousands,” Cordellia replied quietly.

“Fowl,” Tom said, not waiting to hear if the ranger said anything else. “You got lucky. Tanila got lucky. What would you have done if I hadn’t given you that item? What are you doing as a warrior to make defending against things like that easier? Do you stop and consider the distance between you and your support and casters? A few extra yards doesn’t seem like a lot, but that extra second might mean a spell lands, or they dodge just enough, and someone else can help.”

Fowl started to speak but stopped when he watched Tom’s face harden as he turned to face Max. A frown appeared, and the older man slowly shook his head.

“Seth… we have talked many times. Everyone here knows you’re the strongest person in your party, but that also means you bear the most responsibility. Are you doing everything possible to help them succeed? You should be demanding and forcing them to train more. There should be days set aside for each of you to rest and discuss what went well and what didn’t.

“You mention that after the tower floors, you discuss some things in the cart, but be honest, is that really enough time?”

Shaking his head, Max felt the burden of leadership pressing down.

“Things are only going to get worse, and as they do, you need to decide how prepared you will be for them. Where is the man that came here, reading every book he could? What happened to the one who sought wisdom and knowledge, trying to figure out how to defeat things? I remember a warrior who told me they used their brains, turning the dungeon's own design against the creatures. Find him again and make sure that everyone is safe because he is leading as he should.”

Five adventurers sat quietly, letting the words that Tom had just said sink in.

“Perhaps we could train tomorrow instead of rushing into the tower,” Max said as he looked at the rest of his team.

Everyone nodded immediately.

“That's good. Afterward, we can all go to the Faction shop together, and I can give some tips on items to acquire even if none of you want to share the stats of stuff you are wearing now.”

Everyone nodded and Tom stood up from the bench he was straddling, picking up his plate and cup.

“Good. Then finish eating, discuss a few things, and I’ll expect to see everyone a few hours after the sun has been up.”

The older man turned, not waiting for a response, leaving the five of them sitting there in silence.

“So… I guess I owe everyone an apology,” Max said after Tom had left the room. “Tom’s right. I’ve been more focused on clearing the tower than anything else.”

Cordellia raised her hand, and then everyone laughed, causing the elf to blush and shake her head.

“Sorry, I just felt a little like I should do that after how Tom spoke to me. He’s right, though. I should have spoken up and mentioned we were missing out. The training he gives is exceptional.”

A few grunts came, and everyone silently picked at their food for a moment.

“I guess we’ll all find out how bad training will be tomorrow?” Tanila said with a smirk. “Something tells me he isn’t going to hold back.”

“Again!”

Tom’s voice echoed across the training area; all five of them were sweating even though the sun wasn’t like yesterday, and it had only been a little over two hours.

Tanila was trying to thread tiny ice spears through metal rings Tom had set up right at the edge of her range, forcing her to work on accuracy and mana control.

Cordellia was running a course he had set up for her, weaving around objects, jumping over barriers, ducking under hanging poles, all while constantly shooting at targets downrange.

Fowl was being assaulted by four new recruits, standing in the middle of them, doing his best to block their attacks with a smaller shield that Tom was making him use.

Batrire was being forced to heal, gauging the damage done to Fowl by the four and casting when she felt it was necessary. While doing that, she still had to keep up with the fight Max was engaged in. With both men fighting, each at the edge of her healing range and vision, she had to work hard not to get in trouble when Tom called out for her to heal Max.

They all had real weapons, while Fowl was only wearing a leather set. Blood from the injuries he sustained had stained parts of the armor red, but with his constitution, the damage wasn’t much more than superficial.

Max, on the other hand, was trying not to smile.

Tom waited for him, holding two swords at the ready.

The shield and sword combo had always performed well when they clashed, but Max knew Tom was taking it easy on him. The training armor Max wore didn’t provide stats, and Tom was wearing a full set of chainmail, using two enchanted swords and most of his jewelry.

Trying to hide his stats while not getting to use most of his equipment was difficult as the older man continued to land attacks that he could have blocked, knowing if he did, it would reveal just how high his dexterity was.

A flurry of attacks came, and both of Tom’s swords moved with blazing speed, slashing and thrusting at him. Noise came from the metal on metal each time Max managed to block or parry an attack.

He has to have a Legendary skill in swords… those combinations…

Distracted by his thoughts again and the skill Tom possessed, a slash got past his defense, slicing his leg open.

“HEAL!”

Batrire was a few seconds late, not expecting that to have connected, and Tom didn’t hold back.

“He could die! Pay attention!”

As soon as the wound healed, Tom was on the offensive again, death moving toward Max with every swing and thrust expertly placed. A lifetime of adventuring and sparring was on display for the Faction members watching the training.

Word had spread earlier about what was taking place, and a crowd of over fifteen was present, watching the five struggle under the tutelage of one they all knew well.

Max saw an opening, thrusting forward with his sword, only to find Tom’s hand now on his wrist, spinning and twisting. The older man procured the weapon from his grip, taking it and using the very blade he once held against him.

“Heal!”

Batrire was on time with her heal, having watched the exchange and knew Max was about to get a lesson in pain.

Three quick thrusts opened wounds along his arm, hip, and leg as Tom showed the young man just why he was the top trainer of the Faction.

As the heals came and Tom tossed the weapon into his storage, both swords vanished, and the older man lunged for Max, moving in and reaching for the unarmed wrist.

The speed was there, but he was tired of Tom beating him.

Shifting on his feet, using a little more of his dexterity and speed than he had been demonstrating, Max slammed his shield into the older man, amazed when Tom’s right hand blocked it with an open palm. Both hands gripped it and began to pull. This time, Max was fast enough to store it in his dimensional space before Tom could take it, but as he did, he lunged forward, throwing a right-handed punch.

Tom’s hands moved with a speed that seemed impossible to believe. The older warrior's dexterity wasn’t his greatest stat, yet whatever items he had made him faster than Max. He had already done the math, having an idea and understanding of what Tom’s stats would be, yet unless he showed his real potential, Max couldn’t get past the trainer's defenses.

Both hands grasped his right arm, grabbing the wrist and forearm as Tom slid underneath the punch, driving his hip and shoulder into Max’s right side before flipping him over and into the hard-packed dirt.

The sound of his body slamming into the ground was loud enough to draw a few groans from the onlookers as Tom backed away.

“Heal! Damnit Heal!”

The injury looked worse than it was, with his shoulder socket dislocated and a broken collarbone.

Two heals hit in rapid succession, and they began to pop back into place.

“We’re done,” the older man said as he backed up, waiting for Max to recover.

“Everyone take a break!” his voice boomed across the field, and a few of the onlookers clapped as Tom ended the training session.

Rising to his feet as the pain in his shoulder and neck began to fade, Max could see the tiniest frown on Tom's face. His eyes were narrowed just enough that it was obvious to Max something was wrong.

Turning to the edge of the training field, the master of this dirt field saw who he was looking for.

"Dexic! Come here and show this boy what you got!"

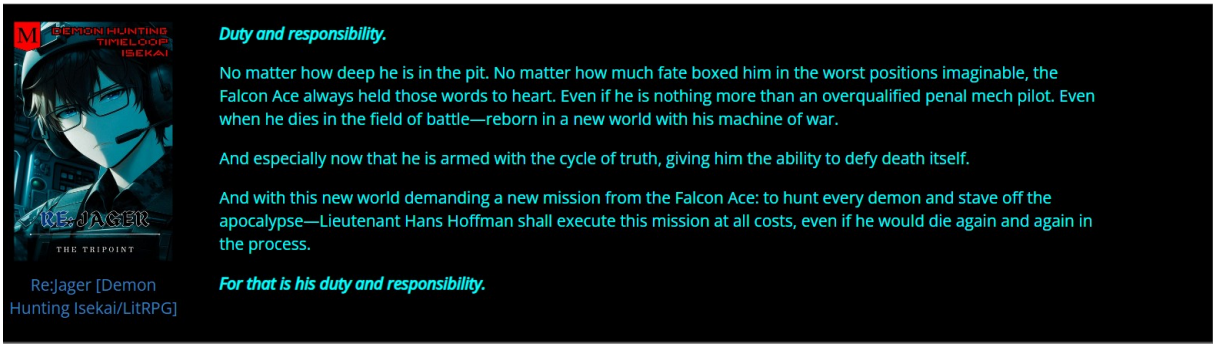
Max groaned when he saw the woman he hadn't had a chance to talk to in forever start to walk toward him.

"Finally!" she exclaimed, grinning ear to ear.

201 - Dexic 201 - Dexic - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

HTTPS://WWW.ROYALROAD.COM/FICTION/89404/REJAGER-DEMON-HUNTING-ISEKAILITRPG


DEMON HUNTING TIMELOOP ISEKAI
RE:JAGER
THE TRIPOINT
Re:Jager [Demon Hunting Isekai/LitRPG]
Duty and responsibility.
No matter how deep he is in the pit. No matter how much fate boxed him in the worst positions imaginable, the Falcon Ace always held those words to heart. Even if he is nothing more than an overqualified penal mech pilot. Even when he dies in the field of battle—reborn in a new world with his machine of war.
And especially now that he is armed with the cycle of truth, giving him the ability to defy death itself.
And with this new world demanding a new mission from the Falcon Ace: to hunt every demon and stave off the apocalypse—Lieutenant Hans Hoffman shall execute this mission at all costs, even if he would die again and again in the process.
For that is his duty and responsibility.

Striding toward him was the woman who always wore gold armor, except at this moment, she wore just standard leather gear. Her hair was back in a small braid behind her, and Max tried to remember if it had always been blond.

Those blue eyes of hers were sprinkling, excited at what she was about to get to do.

"Seth! You have grown!" she exclaimed, delivering a massive slap to his left arm. "I finally get a chance to meet you after all this time!"

Rubbing his arm, Max grinned and looked up at the woman who stood a head taller than him.

"I'm still grateful every day for you letting me join you in that swamp and extending an invitation to me to join the Faction," he replied. "I never realized I had just met one of the greatest members of the Faction that day."

She rolled her eyes and looked at Tom, who was studying the two of them.

"What do you want us to do? Besides not killing each other?"

Smirking, Tom produced the table and had each of them put their hand on it.

A shimmer of light came from it, and both glowed yellow for a moment.

“Don’t kill him. Teach him what it means to fight and show him how a tower climber really is,” Tom replied. He glanced at Max and grinned. “Go ahead and wear everything you can to help in this fight. She’s going to come hard and fast, and I want you to see how it feels.”

Their trainer turned and clapped his hands.

“Everyone! I expect you to remain quiet for most of the fight, no cheering till it’s done. Healers! Make sure that Seth is not unable to continue. Do not worry about healing him too much!”

Having given orders to all those gathered, he nodded at Dexis and then wagged a finger at Max.

“This right here is going to be one of the greatest lessons you’ll ever get for free. Don’t hold back, or you will not learn what true power is.”

He handed Max a small potion and immediately began walking to a different area of the field they were on, choosing to stay away from the rest so he wouldn’t be bothered by the noise they were going to make, no matter what he said.

Max turned to see Dexic already outfitted in her golden armor, tapping her chin as she studied him. Knowing it was a stamina potion, he popped the small top and drank the liquid, smacking his lips at the awful tart taste.

“What weapon do you want to fight with?” she asked.

Groaning inside, Max knew there were few things he could do without showing all of his cards. He was too weak, and even though he knew wearing all of his gear, he might have been able to hold his own against Thomas. Something inside said the same wasn’t true for who he was facing.

“I’ll go sword and shield.”

She nodded, and immediately, a gold kite shield appeared in her hands, with a set of axes emblazoned across the front of it.
“Okay, I have to ask,” Max said as he saw her shield. “Why is everything always gold? Surely your drops from the tower aren’t like that.”

She nodded and smiled under her helm.

“I prefer for everyone to know exactly who my allegiance is to. It does cost money to transform the color, but it has also become a symbol for me. Whenever I encounter another party from a different faction in the tower, they know exactly who is standing before them.”

“Can I ask what floor you are on?”

She paused, and Max almost forgot to listen when a sword he recognized appeared in her hands.

“Forty-seven. I’ll try to make it a little easier for you. Everett told me you found us a crafter who made this, and I can’t wait to use it since he gave it to me today.”

Inside him, the voice spoke, having been silent for days, even though he had expected it to talk for a while.

Before you stands what you must become. Tell me you can feel the power radiating off of her.

Is that what I sense? It's like… like a mountain waiting to fall upon me.

In time, you will crush that mountain and all others, but we need to work together. Some who hunt you will be like her, and as you are about to find out, you won't win, especially since you hide your strength.

Pulling out the sword he was borrowing, the stats on it felt so insignificant. Only offering five strength and nothing else might seem amazing to so many, but he wanted to use his halberd or pull out his new club.

Equipping the shield and sword, he wanted to see what he could possibly do to stand against Dexis.

[Simple Stat Check]

*****

Max Hoste

18-Year-old Human Male

Level 1

Exp 46/1000

Tower Experience: 7.83%

HP: 2650/2650

MP: 1940/1940

Stamina: 1325/1325

STR: 271

DEX: 219

CON: 265

INT: 194

WIS: 194

Defense of the Dragon - 4.0%

Defense of the Demon - 4.0%

Demon Essence: - 313

*****

Looking at his stats for a moment, Max tried to imagine what she had. Knowing that Dexic now held a sword that gave her seventy-five to both her strength and dexterity meant she was easily above a two hundred one one, if not both. The rumors said she had over three hundred on three stats, and some said she had even been four hundred on one. He was about to find out how high her stats were the hard way.

Giving one last nod, Max grinned like a fool.

“Just remember not to kill me in one hit.”

Laughing, Dexic nodded back and moved away some, each soon standing about fifteen yards apart.

“Go!”

The moment Tom shouted, Max didn’t hesitate, rushing toward Dexic as she waited for him, her grin visible through the gap in her helmet.

He came at her, moving his shield and sword as he had many times, choosing to use about sixty percent of his actual stats, knowing how hard and fast to swing.

Each attack he sent was met with a parry or block, and his gold-clad opponent only moved around as he attempted to land a hit.

Her smile grew as he used combo after combo, slamming the shield, sweeping his leg, kicking at her, and more. Even when added a little more speed or a little more power behind an attack, the most recognizable member of their faction rarely had to move at all to stop whatever he did.

Inside, he wanted nothing more than to use a skill and attempt to break through, but doing so would ruin this moment. He got to test out things his mind knew to try, and even though none of them landed a hit, Dexis only deflected them enough so that he could move to the second, third, and sometimes fourth move of a combination.

Having reached the limits of what he could come up with and not wanting to reveal more of his hand, Max backed up, realizing he was sweating and she was as cool as a block of ice.

“Not bad,” Dexic said, her smile and all those white teeth it displayed let Max know she was enjoying this moment. “Almost five minutes straight, and I don’t think you repeated the same combo twice.”

She shifted slightly, her stance narrowing just a tad. He could see how her center of gravity shifted and the way she held her sword next to her larger shield, set just so her eyes could see everything and attack in any direction.

That sudden shift opened his mind to things he hadn’t imagined.

This is what Tom was talking about.

It wasn’t that the creatures in the tower were stupid. Some fought with great skill, but before him was a woman who had spent unimaginable hours honing her craft inside and outside the tower.

“Focus!” she exclaimed. “I’m coming!”

Max was barely able to set himself, adjusting like she did when the warrior in gold came at him.

She moved with speed and grace that defied what one should be able to do in plate armor. Her feet never lost the perfect balance the position offered as she glided almost along the dirt. Every second, the sword was poised, ready to strike. Even though she wasn’t coming at him full speed, she was moving with what she believed was his stats or close to it, unsure if Max had held back at all.

Strikes came rapidly, the shield moving at the same time the sword did, two attacks at once, both requiring Max to give up ground, blocking and parrying each. Combos began to form, and while he felt excited to have the occasional one requiring five or six moves, Dexis soon completed the eleventh attack in a pattern he could only react to because of his Sonar skill. Each strike was perfectly aimed, and no extra energy or effort was wasted while delivering it. She used the momentum of each attack to allow for the next, only having to restart if he managed to block a blow with enough force that it wasn’t there.

“Good!” she exclaimed as he stopped a thrust that almost struck his leg, getting his shield there just in time. “Now the fun begins!”

As if someone had turned up the heat in an oven slightly, allowing more air in to increase the temperature, Dexic began to move faster. It was a gradual increase, not a rapid jump. She was letting him feel the increase, giving him room to try and figure it out and respond.

The time drew close, and Max had two choices: let himself get hit or show more of his true strength. They were pushing the boundaries of what one of his level and with good items could do. He would have to convince Tom that his equipment was better than expected or already believed or that his stats were just that good.

Knowing that a chance like this might never come again, Max chose to reveal just a little more. Already, his mind was cataloging the lessons of strikes and attacks from earlier. He could recall a few that built off the same first three or four strikes before changing depending on how they were blocked or parried.

The sounds of their weapons and shields colliding rang out across the field, and Max had long ago drowned out the sound of everyone and their reactions. His mind was focused on this moment and only this.

Dexis was almost laughing. If it was even possible, her grin grew wider, and she rushed forward, this time increasing her speed so much that it caught Max off guard. The sword slipped past his, hit his shoulder armor, and bounced off, not leaving a mark.

Glows of heals sent his way washed over him, leaving both Max and Dexic confused.

The golden warrior’s eyes scrunched, and her nose wrinkled as she took a step back, making a space between them. She knew that the tip of the sword should have drawn blood.

As she moved again toward him, Max realized what was wrong. He knew why he hadn’t been hurt.

The blade snaked forward again, and he did the only thing he could think of: he moved to block it, using more of his speed. At the last moment, before they would connect, he stored his sword and shield, grabbing onto the moving blade with his hands and fighting for control.

He willed the weapon, calling it his, and a heartbeat later, it was stored in his dimensional storage, leaving his opponent stunned and in shock.

Yet that look on her face was gone. Her shield came forward with more power and strength than before, slamming into his chest and sending Max tumbling backward fifteen yards.

Pain lanced through his chest as a few of his ribs had broken, but again, healing quickly came over him, and he got to his feet just in time to see a foot coming at his head.

Reacting, he raised his left arm, trying to move to the right to lessen the impact of the kick, only to find that it didn’t do anything. His arm snapped from the impact and was sent on another journey across the packed dirt.

“Stop!” Tom shouted as Max began to rise, his wounds already healed again from all the healers who had been ready this entire time.

He looked up and saw Dexic’s gold-colored plate glove just a few inches from his face. Her smile was now gone and replaced with a frown.

“Give me my sword back,” she growled as she stood up and lowered her fist.

Nodding, Max rose, changing from his equipment into normal clothes. He then took the sword out of his storage and handed it back to her, hilt first.

Snorting, she yanked it from his hand, inspecting it once before putting it into her storage and changing as he did.

“Everyone go!” Tom shouted as he arrived at the place where the two of them were standing.

“You two! Everett’s office now!”

202 - The Problem of Secrets [202 - The Problem of Secrets - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

One of my sneaky favorites https://www.royalroad.com/fiction/68106/merchant-crab

Merchant Crab

Book 2 of Merchant Crab is out now! Read Balthazar's journey for gold, pies, and levels in 100+ chapters, with new ones three times a week.

Balthazar was just a random giant crab enjoying his life in a fantasy world full of bothersome human adventurers, but then he had to go and accidentally discover the secret of attributes and levels. And also pie. With baked goods and coin as his new life goals, he turns to the competitive business of trading the random junk adventurers loot every day.

Follow Balthazar as he does everything to find a baker... except leave his pond, because exploring the dangerous world out there is for suckers. Witness how adventurers just can't seem to stop dying around his home. And cheer for a crab who makes great new friends by simply buying them.

//note end

Everett sat behind his desk while Tom fumed silently.

Dexic didn’t hide her displeasure at being ordered before everyone, her and Tom both having had a few harsh words aimed at each other on the trip here.

Tanila and the rest of his party had confused looks, wondering what had happened and why the man they knew had a reputation for being harsh sometimes was acting completely pissed off.

“Tom, breathe and tell me why our two most prominent members are currently sitting across from my desk as if they are in detention.”

It took multiple breaths for Tom to relax. The color in his face and head returned to a normal tan instead of the bright red it had been a few minutes ago.

“These two were supposed to be dueling, practicing, and training, and instead, they were making a mockery of it!” shouted Tom.

Dexic jumped up, about to reply, when Everett held out a hand and shook his head.

“Let Tom finish, then you can have a turn.”

His eyes told her he wasn’t asking even though the way he had said it almost seemed like he had.

Huffing, the top member of the Faction, sat down, gripping the arm of the chair so tight one of them cracked under her fingers.

Sighing, Everett shook his head and motioned to his friend, who was visibly shaking with fury.

“Continue.”

“They danced around, blocking and parrying each attack. Sure, they went faster, and while I was surprised that Seth could keep up as long as he did when Dexic had a chance to injure him, she didn’t! She pulled her blow and sent the blade to the side!”

“I did no such thing!” Dexic bellowed, jumping back to her feet in an instant. “The blade stopped on its own! I am not the kind of–”

“I said wait,” Everett almost growled, rising from his chair, his fingers pressed against the desk.

Clamping her mouth shut, the daggers coming from her eyes at Tom were obvious. This time, she sat down a little slower and made sure not to destroy the chair with her grip.

“Tom…”

“I don’t care what she said!” he exclaimed. “As if that wasn’t enough, in a foolish move, Seth grabbed the sword we just gave her, wrenched it from her hands, and put it into his storage! After that, it was nothing more than a show, her punching and kicking him around the dirt!”

Glancing up to see if the man he trusted with everything was finished, Everett turned to Dexic, leaning against his desk and resting his chin on his hands as he clasped them together.

“Dexic… your turn.”

Max watched as the woman who had been ready to go toe to toe with Tom a minute ago closed her eyes, took two breaths, and when done, opened her eyes, calm as every other time he had seen her.

“The first part was true. I let Seth show me what he had, and I wanted to see his skill, speed, power, and technique. It was impressive, and when he realized there wasn’t anything left he could show me, I’m certain he stepped back so I could have fun.”

She turned, looking at him, and Max nodded, not risking to say anything right now.

“I increased my speed and strength, wanting to see how good he was. If you allow me to give my humble opinion, he’s better than you told me. Everything I sent was blocked or parried, with a skill that I doubt most ten or twenty levels higher than him could master. It’s obvious his weapon skill is epic.”

Unable to stay completely still, Max shifted just slightly, and he saw that all three of them turned their eyes on him at that movement.

“I’ll take that as a sign I’m correct,” she stated. “As far as me pulling my attack, something you know I have never and will never do, I’m not certain what enchantment his armor must have, but the weapon stopped dead when it should have pierced through the shoulder completely.”

Tom moved forward, his mouth beginning to move when Everett’s hand rose, stopping the man from interrupting.

“The next part caught me off guard as I hadn’t expected Seth to do something so bold. The truth is I was confused and a bit upset by how the weapon had failed.”

Shifting in her chair, a squeaking noise came from that movement since the structure had been damaged from her grasp. Dexic frowned.

“That move he did was foolish. Grabbing a weapon like that isn’t something one should ever do unless they’re certain they can win that fight and not be cut by the very blade they are trying to hold. Seth’s speed at which he moved,” she said as she pointed to the balded-headed warrior sitting near her, “was faster than before. A calculated risk? A foolish and desperate action? Either way, it worked, but I cannot answer how he managed to pull the sword from my grip. There is no way it should have ever vanished as it did.”

Grunting, she folded her arms and leaned back in her chair.

“After that, I decided to beat the crap out of him for using whatever trick he had, gladly teaching him a lesson in the process.”

With her mouth closed and her blue eyes focused on Max, Everett turned his attention to the one both Tom and their golden warrior were staring at.

“Care to shed some light on this?” Everett asked. Again, his tone and gaze told Max he had no choice in the matter.

“Do you want the truth?”

All three almost looked like clones of each other, with one eyebrow raised while the other lowered slightly.

“Unless you want me to let Dexic spend the rest of the day beating on you in the training field, yes, the truth, please.”

Nodding, Max sighed, glancing at Dexic, his lips moving between a frown and being drawn tight.

“Take your new sword out and stab my leg with it.”

Their golden warrior shook her head and looked at Max before turning to see what Everett wanted her to do.

“Seriously?
Max nodded and put his leg closer to her.

“Just thrust it. Don’t try to hack it off.”

Everett shrugged, and Tom seemed just as perplexed, but both said nothing as Dexic stood and retrieved the weapon. Slowly, she extended it toward his thigh, less than an inch between the two.

“Don’t blame me if you can’t walk for a week.”

“Just do it,” Max replied, ready to weave the story he had been working on all this time.

She pulled back, thrusting with enough force that Max was certain she might have taken his leg off if he didn’t already know the outcome.

The tip of the sword hit the cloth on his leg and stopped immediately. Then, it slid off the side, sending Dexic stumbling a step and almost putting the sword into the floor.

The sound of Everett’s chair sliding back and Tom's gasp was barely covered by the curse Dexic let out of her mouth.

“What in a goat humpin' troll is that?!”

Everett moved around the desk slowly, and a dagger appeared in his hand when he stood next to Max. Immediately, Max recognized it as the one he had crafted.

Without hesitating, Everett plunged the dagger at Max's neck, ignoring the shout Dexic let out, and watched as the blade again stopped, touching his skin but not damaging it before sliding across the front, leaving no mark.

"What in the gods is that skill?!"

Everett stored the dagger and turned to Dexic, ignoring the look of confusion that was written across her face.

"You need to go–"

"But he just–"

"Go! I will tell you details later, but one of the problems with being a Faction leader is keeping secrets," Everett said. "Do I need to remind you that I keep secrets for everyone?"

Her face turned red, and Max wasn't sure if it was because she was getting forced out of the room or because Everett had just commented on something private.

"Fine!" she huffed, turning her attention to Max. "One day, you and I will have a talk, and when we do, I expect an answer!"

Giving a soft smile and a single nod, Max watched as the woman stormed out of the office, slamming the massive door as she left.

Tom was staring at the two of them in shock.

Glancing back and forth between Everett and Max, the man seemed to be struggling to put together what he had just seen.

Sitting in his chair, Everett stared at Max, slightly shaking his head.

"You said you'd tell the truth. Are you certain you can do that, Seth? Or should I call you Joshua?"

Tom's mouth dropped as his eyes went wide, and then realization struck.

"He's the crafter? How? Why?"

When his friend's hand came up, Tom stopped and glanced around the room. Seeing the chair Dexic had just vacated and went to it, grabbing it and moving it so that he could see both men at the same time.

"You know that dragon dungeon… there is more to it than I can share…" Max said, shifting slightly under the gaze of the person he was receiving. "The story we told was slightly different from what you were told."

"Why would you lie?" Tom asked. "Haven't we proven ourselves?"

Max shook his head.

"It's not just that. Not all of my team knows everything. Some things I can't share. Others… there was a dragon on the last floor, and it made me promise things… stuff I haven't even told Tanila."

Max's words were softer, and both men saw that his head was looking down at the floor instead of at them.

"What would be so dangerous you can't share with her?" Everett asked. "I doubt you keep much, if anything, from that woman."

"I dislike keeping secrets, but as you told Dexic, sometimes they're necessary. After all, how would you react if I suddenly told you that I have a legendary weapon crafting skill?"

Tom's eyes went wide at the truth Max just casually dropped.

"It would have been very suspect," Everett replied, his eyes narrowing slightly. "As you might guess, I would have a lot of questions and probably not take just any answer you gave so easily."

Max nodded and stood up, motioning for both men to stay seated.

"I'm going to show you something. Know that the only way you will ever get this is if you kill me," Max said in a deep voice. "This was a gift from the dragon, and the other was to use it one day."

Hesitating a moment, he watched both men, waiting for them to acknowledge his words with a simple bob of their heads.

When he pulled the dragon tooth from his storage, holding the massive thing in his hands, Tom fell backward, his chair tipping over, and no sooner than he had crashed to the floor, rolled, and was back on his feet.

Everett's chair was falling over also as the man jumped in surprise.

"A dragon's tooth!"

"My dragon's tooth," Max replied before storing it a second later. "The dragon gave it to me and the means to fashion a weapon from it when I have acquired the items to make something worthy of it. That is why I was crafting items for materials. Trying to find if there was anything I knew would work with this."

"And did you?" Everett asked as he moved backward and stood up his chair, sliding it back into place. "Do we have items that would work with that?"

Shaking his head, Max sighed.

"You and I both know anything worth real gold or having wasn't shared with *Joshua*."

A chuckle came from Everett, and he glanced at Tom, who appeared to be unable to handle everything thrown at him.

"Low intelligence stat?" Max asked playfully.

"Boy, I will–"

"Don't," Everett said, cutting him off before chuckling. "Seth is right. Intelligence is one of your lowest stats, though it is higher than most warriors. The truth is that Tom operates based on what he sees, and his knowledge of tactics is one of the best. Yet telling him a dragon gave you a tooth and a skill to turn it into a weapon and then

realizing you were smart enough to purchase an item, hide your identity, and fool us… well, that’s too much.”

Slowly, Tom nodded.

“So now what?” Max asked.

Everett’s cheeks tightened as he frowned slightly.

“I’ll need a moment. Tom, can you grab a drink from my special jar for all three of us?”

Immediately, the trainer perked up and grinned, moving to the shelf that held exactly what he knew his friend wanted.

“Sit, Seth. We need to talk.”

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

I'm home!

Working through the jet lag but I'm back home, pounding some keys and working on catching up on all the edits I need to make!

Glad you are all enjoying the series!

Don't forget **book 3 Is on Amazon!** *(A read there is always appreciated as well as a solid review if you love it!)*

Even better news - **Book 4 Hits Amazon Sept 1st and Book 2 Audio hits Sept 3rd!**!

Don't forget! Dragon Con is at the end of August, first part of September. I'll be there and will gladly sign any books you bring! (I mean... its better if they are 'my' books but hey, why not as long as it's not a death notebook).

Want news that will blow your socks off? (well maybe... perhaps your socks were already missing so thus I can't blow your socks off and mentioning anything else in that connotation might get me in trouble).

SOOO - **My Patreon has Book 5 Starting Monday the 29th ((Chapter 220))!!**

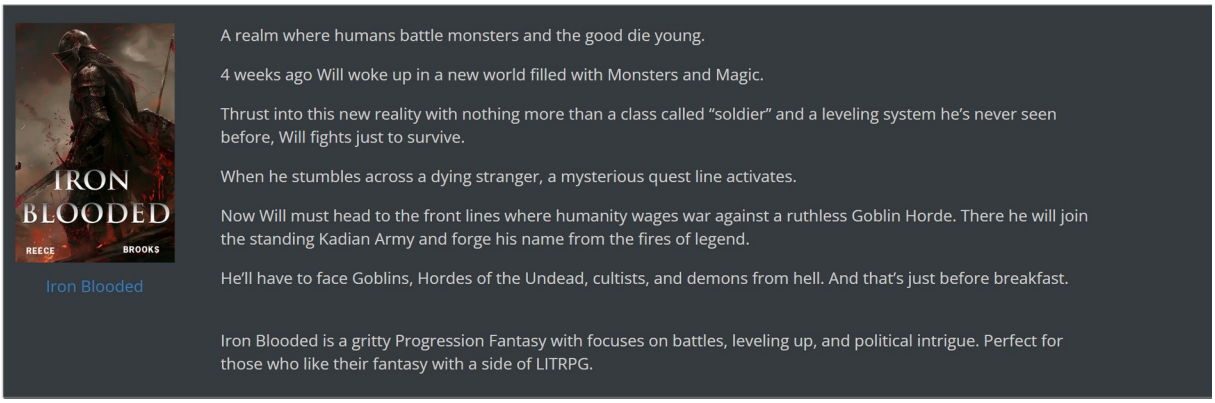
Skip ahead, find out what's taking place with Max and the gang and prepare for book 6 because according to my beta readers its the best one yet. (Which I'm not sure if I should be excited or scared...)

Now back to my dungeon I go to write! (Let's ignore I wrote 10k and 18k in 2 new stories while in Africa).

203 - Blue Balls203 - Blue Balls - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

[IMG_ LINK HTTPS://WWW.ROYALROAD.COM/FICTION/90374/IRON-BLOODED]


IRON BLOODED
REECE
BROOKS
Iron Blooded
A realm where humans battle monsters and the good die young.
4 weeks ago Will woke up in a new world filled with Monsters and Magic.
Thrust into this new reality with nothing more than a class called “soldier” and a leveling system he’s never seen before, Will fights just to survive.
When he stumbles across a dying stranger, a mysterious quest line activates.
Now Will must head to the front lines where humanity wages war against a ruthless Goblin Horde. There he will join the standing Kadian Army and forge his name from the fires of legend.
He’ll have to face Goblins, Hordes of the Undead, cultists, and demons from hell. And that’s just before breakfast.
Iron Blooded is a gritty Progression Fantasy with focuses on battles, leveling up, and political intrigue. Perfect for those who like their fantasy with a side of LITRPG.

//

“That is so smooth,” Tom said with a soft sigh. “We should definitely have him tell us more things like this.”

All three of them laughed as they took their time, sipping the vintage the Faction leader almost never shared.

“I can’t really have word get out that you are making legendary weapons,” Everett said slowly as he spun his glass on the desk. “Which means *Joshua* is still going to need to be the one making them.”

“Sorry,” Max replied. “I figured it wouldn’t be an issue once I was strong enough that it wouldn’t matter if people learned that I had a skill like that.”

Both men nodded, knowing he was right. Power allowed people to do things that weren’t possible when they were weak.

“So you still want to keep making items?”

Nodding, Max shrugged.

“I need to find materials that will allow me to one day craft a weapon worthy of this tooth. If it's possible to make more than one from it, then I’ll gladly do that, but right now, I can’t even cut it. There hasn’t been a single thing I’ve seen that will mesh with it or affect it.”

“You don’t think it’s a godly ranked skill, do you?” Tom asked.

“No one’s seen a dragon’s tooth in so long I doubt there is a book or scroll with knowledge of what is needed,” Everett replied. “That means we’re doing this blind. I’ve got a few items in our vault that he could look through, but trying to explain to the others why we might be using them would cause some problems.”

“Everett, can I ask a question?”

The Faction leader nodded at Max as he lifted his glass to his lips.

“Am I worth the trouble?”

Choking on the small sip he took, it took the older man a moment to catch his breath, the liquor having gone down the wrong hole and causing a different sensation than desired.

Tom attempted to cover his mouth as he laughed, but the alcohol had already made that task fail.

“Why would you ask that?” Everett finally gasped.

“A certain sect of elves wants me dead, someone else outside them tried to kill me, possibly a noble, and I’ve just pissed off your highest-ranked fighter in the Faction. Now you hear I’ve got secrets I can’t share, see the item I won’t share, and know I’m looking to raid the guild vault to make something from it.”

Tom snorted, and his smile looked like it was struggling to stay in place.

“He’s right,” the trainer said, his speech having a hint of slurring. “He is a pain in my arse.”

Everett turned so he could sit straight.

“Seth, listen to me. I can’t imagine what you’re handling. Tom shares some of what he sees, and I know there is a lot more going on under the surface than you’ll share. Even Cordellia, which I’m certain you now know was meant to help us learn more about you, is committed to you completely. This speaks highly of who you are and what you can do. That damn ranger even turned down an item when I offered to trade it for some knowledge, and it wasn’t one most would have resisted.”

Tapping the desk with his finger, Everett grinned.

“She didn’t even hesitate to tell me where I could stick it. Politely, of course.”

Hearing that made Max feel better, knowing that Cordellia had done that for him.

“The truth is I’ve been mostly honest since the beginning, and you know that our desire is to see you reach the fiftieth floor. After that…” he paused and frowned. "If you and your group can make it further, we want to support you, but again, our fear is what lies beyond that level. The fifty-first floor is a beast that some never survive long enough to decide it is too much. One mistake on that level has slaughtered parties who didn’t believe the warnings. The monsters jump exponentially in power. The small curve that is there now changes drastically.”

Tom began to stand and didn’t make it, falling back into his chair.

“Man, the room is spinning,” he muttered, his speech greatly slurring now.

Everett laughed, holding up his cup and showing Max that he still had two-thirds left while Tom had already drunk everything.

“Do you need to help him?”

Shaking his head, Everett held up ten fingers and slowly lowered them. At five, the clattering of a glass cup on the floors rang out, and when all his fingers were lowered, Tom let out a soft snore.

“He never learns… that’s why I don’t drink it that often. Now, I won’t keep you. No doubt the whole Faction is up in arms, and I doubt Dexic has done anything to alleviate that problem. Go and see your members and take care of that shopping Tom told me you five need to take care of.”

Max stood up and nodded. Holding the cup in his hand, he smiled.

“Can I keep this and share it with someone? I’ll bring the glass back.”

Grinning, the older man nodded, and Max made his way out of the room, choosing not to slam it as the one before him had.

“Are you certain we don’t need to put you in hiding?” Fowl asked as Max tried to convince them all that, for the tenth time, everything was okay.

“We will be fine. Now we need to go shopping. Tomorrow is going to be a big day, and I want to make sure we’re a bit more prepared than before.”

They all nodded, heading in the direction of the Faction store while Tanila and Max walked a little slower in the back.

“You sure everything is ok?”

Max nodded and kissed her on the back of her hand as they walked.

“Better in some ways. I’ll tell you later when it’s just the two of us.”

Frowning, the beautiful elf with green eyes and red hair hip-checked him and laughed as he tripped over his feet.

Each of them were putting items into their storage, surprised at what they all had taken out on loan or purchased outright.

“Someone definitely didn’t do this place justice,” Batrire called out from the counter she was at, pulling things out of the box they had brought her. “I could have not sweated in places I don’t want to mention if we had these cloaks.”

Cordellia nodded as she finished storing all the arrows she had acquired, filling up the empty quivers and sticking baskets with hundreds in as well.

“You were right,” Fowl whispered as he stood next to Max, watching the others. "None of the equipment we could borrow was really worth it. I mean, maybe two rings, but Cordellia took those, and I didn’t really need the dexterity that much.”

“Eventually, we’ll need to borrow some, or it might look bad.”

“I was thinking the same thing. So tomorrow, what’s the plan?”

“Besides defeating the boss and moving on?” Max replied with a grin. “I mean, is there anything else to plan?”

“Just making sure there wasn’t some other plan you might have come up with since Tom beat the crap out of you both on and off the training field.”

Both of them were chuckling as the three women joined them, wondering what was so funny.

“Should I ask?” Batrire asked as she studied Fowl’s face.

“No,” Max replied. “We’re just laughing at how I got my arse handed to me today.”

“And I for one am grateful to see that is actually possible,” Cordellia said with a grin. “For a while I was beginning to doubt it could be done.”

The group left the store, laughing and smiling, finding joy in the time they had together and what they had each learned today.

Standing before the tower entrance, the party watched as three other groups before them slowly moved ahead.

“We should have gotten here earlier, but someone was struggling to move from that drink Seth gave him last night.”

Fowl ignored the look Batrire was giving him, nodding slowly as he rubbed his temples.

“Even with that healing, I can’t believe how fast that knocked me out… dwarves would disown me if they saw me go down from such a small amount.”

“Focus,” Tanila said as they moved up another spot.

Max nodded and smiled at her, glad that she felt what he had told Tom and Everett was a good decision for now. As Tom had shown them all yesterday, they were weak, and a group out there would easily dominate them.

“We taking bets on what the floor will be?”

“That feels wrong,” Cordellia replied, causing Fowl to grunt. “What if the tower can hear us and modifies it to what we don’t want or makes it even worse?”

Faster than a star shooting across the sky, Fowl snapped his head up. He looked at the tower before him and frowned.

“I guess it’s too late to say I want to bet it's a one-inch mouse that dies after one hit, can’t move, and can’t attack.”

Max ignored the playful banter and considered what today would hold. The first boss had been overwhelmingly difficult. It had taken every one of their skills and all of

their cooldowns to win. For a moment, part of him wanted to return to the Faction house and craft each of them weapons that would help make this easier.

“That face doesn’t instill confidence,” Tanila whispered. “What are you thinking?”

“I’m done playing, and we’re going to have to get serious. I don’t want to risk you again, and after we get back, I’m going to talk to Everett about taking him up on that offer.”

Biting her lip slightly, she nodded and motioned to the tower.

“We’re up,” Max said, moving toward the entrance.

“Good luck today adventurers, and return home safe.”

They each nodded at the guard who motioned them ahead and stood as one before the massive portal.

“I’ll go first.”

No one said anything, but each of them smiled when Fowl volunteered and stepped up and went inside.

“I take it back. I’m okay with sweating,” Fowl grumbled as he began digging through his storage, seeking the same ring everyone else was looking for.

Beneath the ramp they stood on with the portal back outside was a domain of ice, no warmth of any kind to note present. Each of their breaths caused a vapor cloud to come forth.

“Gods, it's freezing,” Cordellia muttered as she slipped the ring on her finger, letting a sigh out after it began to stop some of the cold that assaulted them.

Tanila had her fire familiar out, providing a little more warmth for those who stood near it.

“No cloaks to prevent freezing one’s arse,” Fowl muttered as he pointed to where Max was staring.

“That looks intimidating. A castle made out of ice?”

Max nodded, his eyes scanning the wasteland before them. No snow was present that he could see, not even flakes in the wind that blew. Instead, everything was frozen; it was simply ice. The ground appeared to have just enough texture to it and cover that it wasn’t one where right now they would have to worry about sliding Fowl along it.

“Three miles to the castle,” Cordellia said as she stood next to Max. “Maybe a little more, but I’d bet gold on it.”

“You see what I see down there?”

She scoffed and nodded.

“You figure out how tall they are yet?”

“Fifteen to twenty feet, and I’d bet gold on that also,” Max replied.

“Giants?” Batrire asked a tinge of fear in her voice.

“No… those aren’t giants, and that’s what bothers me,” Max said slowly. “Whatever the boss is, it's inside the castle, and judging from what I see right now, I can only imagine what it will be.”

“We’re not turning back, are we?” Fowl asked, surprised when everyone turned to look at him.

“Gods no!” exclaimed Cordellia, holding her bow ready as she adjusted the arrows in her quiver. “We’re never turning back again. Got it?”

Nodding, Fowl grinned and then tucked his beard a little more into his plate armor.

“Lead on mighty dwarf.”

Fowl grinned at Max and took the first steps down the ramp, making sure with each step that he wasn’t about to end up sliding down on his arse.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

This chapter title made me chuckle...

Anyways - Got book 5 edited once - sent to publisher. But just because I like to keep everyone in the loop I uploaded what I've edited once to RR so its always going to be ready.

One Big Announcement

Since August 7th last year I have been 5x (or more) a week in publishing chapters. Most of this year I have been doing 2 or more stories with that schedule.

Starting in September I'll be going 4x a week (M/T/Th/Fri).

With fall sports I have lost a little bit of my life - Thursday (Junior High Football). Friday (HS Football / Drumline / Cheer), Saturday (College Football). Toss in swim and yah... well I'm busy.

Will that impact my writing ability? I don't think so but I want to make sure I'm not struggling across the stories I have going on.

I wanted to give a months notice - so I'll remind a little closer.

Thanks as always for supporting me!

204 - Boss Floor Blues[204 - Boss Floor Blues - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG | Royal Road]

The moment they started moving down the ramp that led to the portal in and out of the tower floor, a light snow began to fall.

Each of them groaned slightly as the viewing distance decreased to about half.

“Three of them,” Fowl said, pointing at the three blue giant creatures before them. Each wore some chain armor and carried massive clubs. Long white beards ran down to their chests, and blue horns jutted out of the white hair on their heads. Their blue skin only showed where the armor didn’t cover it, yet other than their size, it was the one thing everyone had commented on first.

“If my math is right, their top stats should be around one hundred and fifty,” Max reminded Fowl. “That means you should be okay, but remember those clubs are going to create more damage from the size.”

“I hear you,” Fowl replied. “While a refresher is good, are you that worried about three of them?”

“Just be smart. Tanila, do you think Root would work on one at all?”

“I’m going to try and see.”

Max nodded and checked to make sure everyone was ready.

“Alright. On your root.”

Tanila cast her spell on the one on the left, watching vines and roots attempt to push up through the frozen ground. The cracking and popping noise of ice breaking carried across the distance, and the other two charged at them while the one whose massive leg was being surrounded roared, trying to rip off the roots with one hand.

“Fire!”

Holding the blazing club, Max unleashed a fireball at the one on the right as Cordellia sent fire arrows.

Soon, a firebolt came from Tanila, joining the race to attack the fifteen-foot-tall giant.

Fowl scurried toward his target, yelling and shouting as the one in the middle lifted its club and prepared to hammer him into the ice below.

Flames billowed over the giant, which the other three were attacking, and Max raced toward it, holding his club back and off to the side.

The giant that was hit with fire arrows and spells was stumbling, crying out as its beard was burnt off, massive burns showing across the blue skin, creating an ugly portrait of ruined flesh on its face.

Fowl’s target attacked. The club came downward and was deflected to the side as the dwarf angled his shield. The impact against the ground sent out a spray of ice fragments for ten yards.

Running at the weakened one, Max saw four more arrows reach the giant before he got there, swinging his club at the unprepared foe.

The strike struck the legs, hitting right at the kneecap. A crack sounded as the bone snapped, causing the giant’s leg to buckle.

“It’s free!” Tanila shouted, alerting Max to the one she had tried to lock down, the sound of its footsteps creating thuds that echoed in his sonar, telling him the giant was on its way before his friend had even called out.

Leaving the giant on the ground, Max dashed toward the third one, seeing it raise its club and prepare to attack him.

His short sparring match with Dexic had taught him a few tricks, and seeing the club that was coming toward him, he dodged the overhead strike, moved to the left, and counter-attacked against its leg.

The knee buckled inward, sending the giant to the ground as the momentum from its swing and the loss of its right leg toppled it immediately.

Without waiting, Max began delivering the second attack, twisting his body and using the momentum of the first strike that he had created when swinging through the entire attack.

Jumping and coming down with the club, he smashed into the monster's back, sounds of bones breaking under the impact and a low groan as his weapon connected.

The flames of the club were spreading along the giant, causing it to burn on both its leg and back.

Letting bounce back from the blow help him bring the weapon back into position, Max drove forward, this time slamming the club onto the creature's head, earning him a satisfying crunch as the skull broke.

A much colder thread ran through him, and Max shook for a moment, unsure if it was the gain of something or the tower floor temperature.

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Would you like to learn [Ice Resistance]?]

[Yes / No]

Selecting yes, he ran toward the first giant he had attacked, seeing it was trying to stand up, the fire that had ignited on its leg beginning to go out.

The monster was dead two swings later, and another chill ran through him.

[Skill Consumed is Equal to Rank of Current Skill]

[Power stored for future use]

Fowl was doing exceptionally well. He held the giant's attention, landing the occasional hit with his weapon while allowing his thorn aura to keep it focused on him. Each of his blocks was significantly better, learned through the beating he took yesterday.

Coming up from behind, Max Stealthed, delivering a blow so powerful it shattered the giant’s hip in a single strike. After that, it was a mercy to kill it with one more.

“Gods, those things are huge,” Fowl groaned as he stretched his arms and shook them out. “They hit hard, but nothing like that minotaur boss did.”

“What’s your thoughts on roots?” Max asked as he watched Tanila and the others approach.

“It works, just not long at all. Maybe fifteen seconds if we’re lucky. Probably five if we aren’t.”

“The good news is I can aim for their eyes, and those fire arrows really pack a punch against them,” Cordellia said. “I think we can blind and disable one with her fire magic and my arrows, which will help against larger packs.”

Everyone looked at Batrire, who rolled her eyes.

“I healed, Fowl lived. Seems that everything worked out fine.”

Their dwarven warrior chuckled and pointed at the corpses.

“What are we going to farm from them?”

“Maybe the horns?” Max replied. “Unless you’re wanting to check for something a bit more personal.”

The snow grew a little more regular, and they continued to deal with each pack of giants they encountered. One had five, and Max had to use his root spell, cursing when his was the one that broke first.

None of the giants stood a chance against his new weapon, Cordellia’s pinpoint accuracy, and the damage that Tanila’s fire spell was doing. Each group of monsters fell in moments, burnt or bashed to death.

I hate needing to wait for mana, Tanila said as everyone stood near her familiar.

“Part of the mage's life,” Fowl said as he tried to take a drink, frustrated at how quickly the water in his skin started to freeze.

Looking at the skill he had picked up, Max wondered why it was so low.

[Skill Description - Ice Resistance]

*****

Ice Resistance—Rare Skill: Reduces all damage and effects of cold-related attacks or environments by 40%.

*****

I guess legendary would be seventy or eighty percent, meaning godly would have to be close to ninety or one hundred percent.

Lost in his thoughts, Max saw Fowl waving his hands and turned to see what was up.

“We’re ready unless you need a moment.”

Shaking his head, Max moved a few steps away and pulled out his flaming club.

“Nope, just doing math in my head. Thankfully, I have a high enough intelligence that my brain doesn’t hurt when I attempt it.”

Within two hours, they were finally at the entrance to the giant ice castle. Massive ice walls rose up two hundred feet tall, with a single entrance point. A huge pair of doors that were seventy feet tall, also made of solid ice, were cracked open. Standing outside the door were two giants, both twenty feet tall and holding two clubs the same size as the previous monsters they had faced.

“Those are going to be a lot worse,” Fowl muttered as he studied their next target. “Their skin is a deeper blue also. Think there will be any inside the gate that join them?”

“Only one way to find out,” Max said as he waited for Batrire to finish casting her buff.

Two fireballs roared through the air toward the giant on the right while Cordellia released her arrows. Red and orange streaks traveled across the open area.

Cordellia’s fire arrow struck first, striking the left eye of her target and causing it to howl in pain. However, as the two fireballs were about to strike, a massive ice wall rose from the ground, protecting the injured giant.

“Shite!” Fowl shouted as he raced toward the pair. “One of them is a caster!”

Max ran toward the pair, unsure what was about to take place as the appearance of the wall had been totally unexpected.

“Go!” Tanila shouted as she summoned another fireball, letting it grow in size and waiting for the target she and the ranger were working on.

Charging them, the giant on the left covered the ice with a speed that seemed almost impossible compared to the previous ones. Its feet suddenly had a blue shimmer around them. Both of its massive eight-foot-long clubs shimmered with a blue aura, and ice shards dropped from them as they swung with its stride.

“Careful!” Max shouted, realizing now that the battle on the boss floor had just increased drastically.

The sixty yards separating them was gone in seconds, and the giant came at Fowl, preparing to swing.

Planting his feet, their dwarven warrior prepared to block when a pillar of ice rose up under him.

The sudden appearance of the ice formation raised the dwarf off the ground about ten feet in a second, only staying stuck to it because of his armor's natural ability to stay rooted.

Max cursed silently, knowing that everything was going sideways in a heartbeat.

[Demonic Teleportation]

[Power Strike]

Max moved through the portal he had created, and as he did, he felt an arrow pass over him.

A roar came as the arrow struck an eye, causing the swing of the giant to miss slightly.

Instead of both clubs coming together, smashing Fowl between them, one went low, destroying the ice wall it had created, while the other smacked into Fowl, who twisted, bringing his shield to block at the last second the one that still hit him.

He was sent flying through the air, thirty yards to the right, tumbling and rolling.

The portal above the giant opened up behind its head, and Max slammed downward with his weapon, pissed at the monster that had just abused his friend.

A squelch and crunching noise filled his ears as the club grew brighter, the flames rising slightly more, and the giant fell to the ground, crashing against the frozen floor.

Flames licked the edges of the massive hole in its back where its spine and neck had been, now pulverized into the ground.

Turning his attention to the first giant they had tried to take down, Max saw it was moving, not near as fast as the other one. Holding a club up, a cloud formed over Cordellia and the others standing together, ice shards starting to rain down like daggers.

Max raced toward the monster, casting his air shield and seeing that Tanila did the same. The three support people hunkered under the protective covering as three-foot-long ice shards rained down upon them.

The fireball she had been building up roared toward the giant. She had put so much magic into the spell that the size of it was almost five feet wide.

Seeing the incoming spell, it raised both clubs, partially blocking the fireball as flames billowed around the glowing weapons. When the fire passed over them, both arms looked scorched, and part of its hair was on fire. Even the blue glow that surrounded the clubs had lessened, appearing ready to disappear.

Creating a fireball as he ran, Max let it form and sent it toward the monster, watching as Fowl charged the giant, having managed to get back up on his feet.

Another howl of pain and agony came as Cordellia found the other eye with her arrows, the training that Tom had put them through paying off in massive ways.

Blind and injured, the giant found itself dead on the floor like the other in a few moments, both legs shattered and its head bashed in.

[Skill Consumed is Equal to Rank of Current Skill]

[Power stored for future use]

Huffing, Fowl winced as he waited for Batrire to heal him once more.

“That wasn’t fun,” he grumbled. “When the hell did these things get smart?”

“You mean, when did we run into something with enough brains and brawns to give us a run for our money?”

Nodding, the dwarf checked his shield, obviously glad to see that it was still in working order.

“Though that is a good trick to remember,” Max said with a grin. “We never considered that, did we?”

Snorting, Fowl nodded, and they watched as the others joined them.

“I guess we just learned something valuable,” Tanila said as she approached the pair. “Walls have other uses than blocking and shielding.”

“Seth was just commenting on that,” their dwarven warrior replied. “But don’t forget scaling walls either.”

Laughing, the four of them all enjoyed a moment, then realized Cordellia was looking at them, not knowing the joke.

“Sorry… Seth used them once to climb a wall so we could skip a part of a dungeon.”

Bobbing her head, their ranger grinned, seeing the intelligence of such an action.

“Well, now what?” Batrire asked, motioning to the open gate that was not that far from them.

“I guess we go in,” Max replied.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

BOOK 5 IS COMPLETELY UPLOADED! ENDS OCT 26TH!!

Just wanted to let everyone know that UL1 - Book 5 is set to release 5x a week through Oct 26th. (it Hits Amazon Nov 1st so don't wait to finish reading as KU requires me to take it down).

Looking forward to you all enjoying the next journey for Max and the gang! (Patron's already digging its current path).

Even better.. book 6 is almost 80k words! (And my beta readers are drooling about it)

205 - No Way Out205 - No Way Out - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG (Book 4 Stubs 8/29!) | Royal Road

The walls of the ice castle hid the vastness and dangerous side of the boss floor behind it.

Like the minotaur and werewolf tower floor, a town was laid out with streets cut from shaped ice and buildings over seventy feet tall, blocking their vision as cold shadows cast upon them.

“It’s as if they replicated a normal town but amplified everything,” Fowl pondered aloud, stepping through the forty-foot-thick opening in the ice wall. What could be the plan here?”

Max stood there, gazing upon the wide streets, and was hesitant for the first time in a while.

“Magic using giants, each bigger yet not stronger. Their ice magic isn’t so bad that our air walls can’t stop them, but the real problem is how many might come.”

Turning, Max smiled and nodded at Cordellia.

“Of course, with our newest addition blinding them so quickly, our chances are much better.”

Grinning from ear to ear, Cordellia was either blushing or had red cheeks from the cold.

“How many can we take at once?” Tanila asked, keeping close to her fire familiar. “Three? Four?”

Everyone stood there quietly momentarily as they tried to decide the best plan.

“We could choke point right here,” Max replied. The opening isn’t that wide, and with their magic, the ice wall surrounding us would work for using earth and air barriers to protect us from their spells. If Fowl got smacked sideways again, at least it wouldn’t be that far.”

“No… into a massive piece of ice,” their warrior grunted. “Still, it’s not a bad plan. Do you think you can move through the buildings safely and bring some? What happens if like twenty come?”

Rubbing his face, the new skill made Max realize he really no longer felt the cold, especially with the ring equipped.

“I can use my trump card, but I’d rather not… that’s something I prefer to save for the boss.”

“We could retreat to the doors,” Batrire pointed behind them. “They are only open about thirty feet. That would really help hold them at bay and with you and Tanila both casting fire magic, it might actually be the best spot to bring every giant to.”

“That’s my woman!” Fowl exclaimed, winking at their healer.

Everyone nodded; it was actually the best plan. Moving back to the gate, Max started chipping away holes in the ice outside the doors that swung outward. Once he had about three feet dug down, he wedged the axes he had taken from the minotaurs and used them to prop against the ice ridges of the massive doors.

“I can’t promise those will hold long, but it's better than nothing if they try to push against and swing these doors open.”

Fowl nodded and held his position right in the middle of the doors while the other three moved back about twenty yards, the soft snowfall drifting upon them.

“I’ll be back,” Max said with a wink as he ran off into the portcullis.

Slowly, Max made his way through the street that ran right from the portcullis and into town, turning slightly off to the left.

No giants were visible, but he wasn’t going to run through town without a care.

Sneaking along one of the buildings that resembled a house made of stone ice blocks, he considered what he had learned so far and what could be done to help overcome the problems they faced.

Reaching the edge of the building where the first street intersected, Max heard footsteps coming closer. They sounded like massive beasts, and when he peeked quickly around the edge, still about fifty yards off, three giants appeared, each matching the appearance of the first two they encountered.

Staying hidden, he began creating a fireball, letting it build up in power as the three giants drew closer with each step.

Knowing they were only about twenty yards away, he sent the fireball toward them, directing it at the furthest one on the left.

A roar came from the pack, yet he didn’t wait to see if the fireball hit. Instead, he chose to run back toward the entrance.

The sound of their feet hitting the ground told Max they were chasing him now, and glancing over his shoulder revealed that the one he aimed for was a bit behind the other two, the fire having burnt its arm and chest.

His sonar told him a wall was rising before him, and Max darted quickly to the right, avoiding the barrier and dancing back to the left when another appeared a dozen yards past the first.

More roars of frustration and anger came as he ran into the portcullis and led the giants toward his friends.

“Seventy-two,” Fowl muttered. “Seventy-two of these giants. How many more are there?”

Max shrugged, knocking off another set of horns and storing them.

“Honestly, I think I’ve cleared most of it. They aren’t that densely packed, but this would have been far worse if we fought in the streets.”
“So you want to move and look for the boss?”

Shaking his head at Tanila, Max held up a finger.

“I want to make one more check and make sure there aren’t any more patrols or moving troops. They don’t move fast while just walking around, and the streets go on for a while. You four rest, eat something, and I’ll be back. If it looks clear, we can try to make it to the next wall and through that gate.”

Fowl didn’t wait to relax after receiving permission; he pulled out two wooden chairs he had decided to bring for moments like this.

Chuckling, Max turned and jogged back into the city, wondering if they were finally going to be done with this part of the floor.

Finding the path clear, Max led them toward another wall just as tall as the outer one, yet the gate had been closed. It was just as tall as the first gate, except this one had a massive giant holding a club that appeared to be at least fifteen feet tall in the carving on it.

“That looks foreboding,” Tanila said as she pointed at the image where the head of the giant left horn was snapped off. I’m assuming this is the boss.”

Max nodded and pointed at the wall.

“I can climb it, drop a rope, and we can look down and see what’s on the other side. My only problem is that doing so removes that option later if needed.”

“So, go in blind or risk using a possible escape? And that might also be our one chance to turn the tide to our side?”

Nodding, Max felt his dwarven friend pat him on the back.

“Just checking. Now go push open that door, and let's see what we got.”

Putting both hands on one of the doors, Max gave it a shove, and as always, the size and weight of the door seemed not to matter, opening slowly and soon providing a ten-foot gap for them to move through.

“Let’s go,” Cordellia said, moving past Max and choosing not to be afraid of what lay beyond the gate.

Standing outside the portcullis was a field of snow, sunken down and littered with what looked like broken armor and weapons of failed attackers. The snow that fell had magically grown thick now, no longer the gentle drift but instead large flakes almost assaulted one's face and body as the wind whipped around them.

“Gods, it just got colder,” Fowl muttered as he shuddered, holding his shield and weapon ready. “I can’t see anything past about a hundred yards. You?”

Max shook his head as Cordellia did the same.

“How thick is that snow?” Tanila asked, everyone still standing in the space under the wall.

“We won’t know until we get into it, but that might cause problems with maneuvering. I’d say we could turn around, but the door is already closed.”

“We’re not running,” Cordellia replied, giving Max an icy glare. “Stop saying that!”

Batrire held up her hand and motioned toward the area well past them.

Each of them stared, straining to see what she had, and then the shape moved as a soft thud occasionally came through the wind.

“Mother of dragons,” Fowl cursed. “That thing is way taller than the others!”

Everyone stood there staring at a blurry, dark shape in the snowstorm, moving slowly across the area, easily towering over the giants they had just faced by at least half.

“We need to move,” Max said as the shape stopped, appearing to turn. “This is a bad spot to get trapped in.”

Fowl shrugged his shoulders once and started moving forward.

“I’ll lead, Seth supports, and you three stay back, so if something happens, you’re out of range.”

Not waiting for a response, Fowl moved into the swirling snow, his feet starting to sink in until the snow reached his knees, requiring him to work harder as he trudged toward the boss.

Glancing at the others, who were waiting, Max began to follow their main warrior, wondering what this fight was going to really be like.

Slowly, the boss’s shape began to become clearer, and the knowledge that visibility was about seventy yards for making something out with detail made things worse.

The boss was almost forty feet tall, holding a massive round wooden shield and carrying a weapon that was easily fifteen feet tall, just like the door had depicted.

Fowl was still moving forward, slowed down by the piles of snow that left a trail as he moved. Cordellia seemed to almost walk on the snow, and Tanila was barely sinking in either. Batrire tried to follow the trail her man had left while Max stayed off to the left some, carrying his flaming club.

The boss’s club glowed with the same blue color, except his was almost like a royal blue, rising a few feet off the banded club it carried. Only the right horn remained, and the left one was gone, giving the boss an air of experience. Its long white beard could have made a blanket for a few dwarfs, and unlike the rest of the giants, this one wore a plate version of armor.

Worked silver-like metal covered its forearms, shoulders, and chest, and a massive belt that protected its hips had a huge buckle of some kind of bone oxen or other skull.

Thick armor protected its legs and knees.

This one isn't going to have many weak spots. It's going to–

A roar came, and the boss pointed its hammer at Fowl and them.

"Fools! This is my domain! Come! Join the bones of all those who have fallen before you!"

Its voice caught them all off guard, deep, thick, and filled with rage.

"Holy–"

"Just fight!" Max shouted, cutting off Fowl's curse as the boss began to move toward them. It didn't run like the others; instead, each step was careful and placed with precision as it held the shield and weapon at the ready.

Cordellia sent a fire arrow, and then another, yet each one was easily blocked by the boss's shield. Between its braided beard and mustache, a massive grin appeared.

"Seth?!" Tanila called out questionally.

"Fireball, its face! On three!"

Both of them built a fireball, and the boss slowed down, seeing two of them casting and apparently noticing that one of them wasn't dressed like a caster.

When Max shouted three, Tanila's larger fireball raced toward the boss's face while Max's flew toward its hand holding the weapon.

The shield blocked the spell aimed at its head while the other struck the hand holding its weapon.

Steam rose from where the blue skin and the flames met, causing the boss to bring its weapon hand near its face. Blowing on the flames still present, a cold blast of air came from its mouth and put them out.

An even larger grin, yet much more evil appeared, and it started to laugh.

"Oh, we are going to have fun playing!" it shouted.

And then it charged.

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As the boss came close, its head flashed red, and then it roared.

Waves of fear came from it, and Max felt the slightest twinge of it touch his heart before melting away.

Fowl stood there, unable to move, transfixed by the boss and what it had done.

His sonar told him that Cordellia likewise wasn't firing anymore, her body frozen as if by magic.

[Intimidation]

Another wave of pressure went out, this time from Max, and the boss stumbled just in the slightest. Its eyes were taken off of Fowl, and it turned to the human rushing at it, holding a flaming weapon.

“You are worthy!” it bellowed, facing the tiny man who barely came to its knees.

His mind raced as Max considered what was about to happen. Strength-wise, he probably had this boss beat with his items, but its size and weight would overcome that. One real hit might not kill him, but if the boss had an ability like a power strike, there wasn’t a way he would survive without his own skill.

Starting the casting of Fire Nova, Max continued to strafe, trying to turn the boss away from his allies and provide them any chance to attack without having to worry about that shield.

While not fast, the size allowed it to reach Max in two steps, and the club came down with tremendous force.

The blue, glowing club slammed into the ground, creating a shockwave like so many other bosses seemed to have, causing the ground to rise and fall for about twenty yards. Max managed to avoid the strike, using his sonar to give every advantage while relying on his ability to evade to guide his steps.

Fire Nova went off, sending out three waves of fire, melting the snow that surrounded him and the giant, rolling up its feet and shins.

Max moved with the ground's undulations as the boss tried to drag its weapon along the frozen soil toward the human, who was not only avoiding his strikes but had also singed its flesh slightly.

The flames had made running easier, removing some of the drift that made him have to work harder, giving Max the chance to move toward the boss.

An explosion rocked the boss’s back, causing it to grunt as it tried to pull its weapon up, preparing to kick Max who was now near its feet.

Max swung his club, focusing the rage and frustration of a boss that either had killed multiple adventurers in their pursuit of the tower or was designed just to piss him off with taunts.

The flames of the club grew brighter and when he connected his attack against the boss’s shin, it made a clanging sound, shifting the boss’s leg back slightly and leaving a slight dent in the metal. Flames rose up on the outer edge of the armor, yet Max didn’t wait to watch and see what it would do. Max let the energy provided by the impact with the armor help him use the collision, spinning and absorbing the momentum.

That gave him time to dodge to the left, avoiding the boss's attempt to step on him.

The ground shook, and Max jumped away to safety, rolled, stood up on the back side of the right leg, and attacked again.

Roaring, the boss sent its hammer down at Max, who saw it coming thanks to his sonar. Max dodged between the boss’s legs, and the blow hit the dirt again, sending another shockwave that rolled out, stopping when it reached the monster’s feet.

The game of elephant and mouse began as Max struck repeatedly, his club delivering blows to the back, front, and sides of the shins while the fire continued to burn, not getting a chance to go out.

Repeated steps and attempts at kicking while using its weapon failed to catch Max, who was too fast for it.

A third fireball struck its back, and dozens of arrows were scattered across its neck and arms.

Tired of getting hit by both sides, the boss ignored Max and turned toward Tanila, Cordellia, and Batrire.

“Freeze!”

A massive cloud formed above the women, and Max saw the first shards of ice plummet from it, each one at least six feet long and much thicker than the spell the smaller giants had used.

He cast his ice, stone, and air walls all over Tanila, trying to protect her while she helped the other two scramble toward her.

His air wall only blocked half a dozen direct hits before failing, while the stone wall blocked almost twice as many.

There wasn’t time for him to worry about protecting them anymore; Tanila and the others could take care of themselves, and Fowl had started to move, finally breaking free from the boss's intimidation.

“Coming!”

Max was done not going all out. Unsure if it would have been the best choice, he instead let the anger at seeing his friends be in danger flow through him.

The flames on the club doubled in size, and the heat they put off, and he focused his vision on the same spot he had hit a few times already.

[Power Strike]

[Magical Strike]

[Rampage]

Like a knife through butter, his club tore off the shin of the boss on its right leg, causing the spell it was channeling to end as it dropped to the ground, landing on its knee and using both shield and weapon not to fall face first.

Fowl had just reached the point where he could attack, and with the boss down, he started banging his pointed mace against the left foot nearest to him.

Blue blood spilled out rapidly from the massive wound. A blue bone was jutting from the end as well.

With a howl, the boss flashed green, and the boss floor went silent.

Everyone had basically forgotten about the sound the snowstorm made. The howling wind was an afterthought when every moment required you to focus on the forty-foot-tall boss that cast ice storms, sent the ground vibrating with each attack, and appeared for a while unable to be damaged.

Yet when the sound of the storm vanished, and every noise, like the sound of Fowl's weapon against a metal boot, stopped. Each of them froze, wondering what was going to happen next. Everyone except their dwarven warrior who continued to attack with a vengeance.

Ice and snow began to spin and rotate, all spiraling toward the giant that was still howling.

Max tried to push toward the boss, but he was unable to move closer to the leg he had wounded. Ice and snow flowed into the gaping injury, and tinier threads ran to where arrows were in its back.

"It's healing!" Tanila shouted, her voice carrying over the noise only because of Max's sonar skill.

Sure enough, the flesh of its leg was growing back, and so was the plate armor he had just destroyed. Fighting the forces that seemed to push him away, Max tried to get close, slamming his club into the swirling mist of snow and ice, only to get pushed away.

Don't! Wait!

The voice stopped him from doing what he had planned to do. Max had planned on using his berserker ability to overcome the healing, but now he backed up, giving himself a little space as the area they were fighting in became nothing more than frozen dirt.

Weapons and armor that were bent and smashed into pieces fell to the ground, and the snow that had supported them was gone.

For over twenty seconds,, every bit of ice and snow within a hundred yards was gone, and now the boss was fully healed, his leg and its armor back.

"I'm going to crush you!"

Its head snapped toward Max. Those black eyes seemed soulless and desiring to consume him.

As it began to rise, Max knew the moment he had been waiting for had come.

"Hit it!" he shouted.

Max used everything he planned in that moment, ready to see if he could finally end this.

[Spider Walk]

[Demonic Magic]

[Demonic Teleport]

[Evasion]

[Bulwark]

[Armored Warrior]

[Berserker]

One moment, he was on the ground. The next, Max was on the boss’s right shoulder, standing on those plated pauldrons.

Max couldn’t really see it, but the club he was wielding was blazing like a star, the power of it so overwhelmed by the rage inside him at that moment that it cut like an inferno.

Blow after blow slammed into the boss’s head, sending the giant stumbling and breaking off the other horn.

Massive chunks of flesh flew from the skull, each strike tearing pieces like a stick against a pinata. Even when the giant tried to smack Max off, his skill's grip, combined with every other defensive ability, prevented it.

The hand that came toward him pulled back without any fingers, a torrent of blue blood flowing from their missing areas, a wooden club burning blue with the heat of a star churned against anything that got close.

Max gave in to that moment, choosing not to try and control the rage, instead letting it fuel his attacks.

This weapon was built for this moment, and like a pyre doused with the strongest burning liquid, it roared with a heat that would melt any that stood in its way.

Even as the boss fell, half of its head gone and more pieces being taken off each second, Max continued his assault. Ice and snow began to stream toward the massive giant, trying to regrow and heal the injured area again, but the amount of damage being done was too much and too rapid. The snow flooded past Max like a storm, and each bit of bone and flesh that was rejoined evaporated in a heartbeat.

Suddenly, the ice and snow swirling in the air vanished.

The cold sensation that had flooded through him was not noticed.

Only when he, the boss, hit the ground and his weapon struggled to swing for a moment, hitting the dirt, did Max finally notice that he had killed the boss.

Pulling back the anger inside, he waited for the rage to end and then found himself panting, both hands on fire.

[Regeneration]

Glancing at his weapon, Max saw only a thin piece of wood left—barely two inches thick and three feet long. In his hands, he held a charred twig.

“Seth!”

Fowl’s voice made him look for his friend as he stored the charred stick.

“Salvage something!”

Glancing at where he stood, all Max could see was blue blood covering everything. The brain was gone, destroyed, and there was no ear or scalp even to harvest. Barely a third of the head remained.

Drenched in blood at his feet, still standing sideways as his spider walk held him, Max immediately summoned his harvesting knife and cut the hair off the base of the skull still remaining.

A decent-sized braid was in his hand when the boss began to disappear, and Max’s spider walk ability failed, dropping him to the ground with nothing to hold onto.

“Seth!”

Turning to where the others were, he saw some blood on their clothes and realized they had suffered injuries under the storm of ice spears.

Batrire’s mana was at half, a rare thing for her. She was jogging toward him with the others, chatting with Cordellia about something.

Tanila was almost out of mana and looked tired from that fight.

“You ok?”

She nodded, coming to where he was, ignoring the gore that covered him, and let him give her a quick kiss on the cheek.

“I’m not sure we would have survived that ice storm without you tossing those shields at first,” she replied. “Batrire almost used her barrier, but we were fine once you broke its channeling of the storm. How hard was it?”

Realizing there were notifications for him to check, Max tapped his head and then pointed at the largest chest they had ever received, waiting for them.

A weird sound of someone crying caught his attention, and both of them spun and saw Fowl wiping tears from his face. His hairy chest was on display for everyone, seeming unaffected by the cold breeze.

“My chest! It just vanished!” he lamented, not caring that everyone but Batrire didn’t enjoy the view.

“I didn’t realize dwarves were that hairy,” Cordellia said louder than she had planned, sending Max and Tanila into a fit of laughter while Batrire just grinned before replying.

“You’ll never know how great a hairy chest is, getting a good grip and all.”

Max felt his mouth open and his tongue trying to escape as his stomach began rolling, visually imagining that taking place.

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[Consume has Successfully Consumed Bonus Stats]

[10 Strength Consumed]

[10 Constitution Consumed]

[7 Intelligence Consumed]

[7 Wisdom Consumed]

Glancing at the notifications, Max tried to walk and think while pushing the image of Batrire grabbing onto Fowl's chest hair out of his mind.

Was there more intelligence to be gained or was that just the max of how powerful it was?

Wondering how many points the boss possibly had in strength and constitution also left some burning questions, but he ignored that as he reached out to put a hand on Fowl's shoulder and stopped himself.

"Uh… sorry… it served you well, though," Max said, doing his best to comfort his friend. "Why don't you put a shirt or something else on though, before your nipples freeze and can't be healed."

Sniffing and laughing, Fowl nodded, his old plate chest appearing in a moment.

"I knew it was going to happen, but… part of me wanted to keep it. I felt like it allowed me to be more help."

"You were fine. We couldn't have survived without your help. Now stop crying, look at that chest behind you, and go open it."

Fowl turned his head and spotted the chest behind him, almost snapping his neck when he realized how just massive it was.

"Damn, that's a massive chest!" he exclaimed, beaming with excitement. "You know how much I love a large chest, but that thing is the biggest one I've ever seen!"

Sighing, Max nodded and pushed his friend from behind toward it.

The dwarf dashed across the thirty yards or so where it sat, a massive chest made from dark blue ice. Runes ran across the top and bottom band that housed the etched relief of giants. One massive giant stood in the middle at the front, both horns now snapped off its head.

Everyone jogged to catch up, but Fowl didn't wait, throwing the lid back and looking inside.

"Sweet mother of dwarven ale! Ockrim does love me!"

Before any of them could get there, Fowl reached in and pulled out a plate chest piece.

It was gold, not as bright as the one he had been wearing yet it reminded Max of the one Dexic wore.

“What’s it give?”

Fowl looked up at Batrire and grinned.

[*Inspect Armor*]

*****

Golden Defender

+40 Strength, Constitution, Dexterity

20% Damage Mitigation against larger enemies

Unmovable

Bonded

*****

Max’s eyes widened at hearing that it gave so many stat points, and saw Cordellia’s jaw drop.

“Did he just say… forty?”

“Your damn right I did! Quick! Come see what else is in there!”

No one waited, racing to see what else might be inside, each of them going wide eye at the swirling purple area and the goods waiting to be claimed.

A blue staff with markings on it waited for their mage. Cordellia was barely able to resist grabbing the quiver, which was the same color as the chest. Batrire raised an eyebrow at the pair of pants waiting for her. It was a striped pair with blue and white lines, and it looked like a cloth of some sort.

“Is that…” Max started to ask before stopping himself.

In the chest was a poleaxe, similar to the one he had used all this time. This one had blue metal and white runes running along it, a black shaft going down, and a spike on top that was over a foot in length.

Three yellow crystals, each twice the size of the other typical ones taken from the chests were radiating with a power that was almost able to be felt even from the storage.

Five places in the chest were also marked with an *X* waiting to be rolled on and not showing what might be given.

“That’s awfully weird,” Cordellia said as her fingers twitched. “But then again, I’ve come to expect that from partying with a dwarf with a hairy chest.”

Everyone chuckled, and Fowl groaned.

“Grab yer damn loot and tell me what it is!”

Each reached in at the same time, pulling out their items and staring at them with excitement. No one could resist the widening of their eyes as they discovered the stats of the new thing they now possessed.

[*Inspect Weapon*]

*****

Conqueror of the Broken Prince

+40 Strength, Constitution, Dexterity

30% Damage to larger enemies

Cleaving

Bonded

*****

There was the slightest moment when Max wanted to complain about losing the thirty-five percent bonus damage to monsters of a higher level, but then he remembered why that really didn’t matter.

He was short.

“How good is it?” Fowl asked, almost drooling with anticipation of the stats.

Upon hearing them, everyone nodded in appreciation.

Tanila shared hers, earning a gasp from Batrire.

[*Inspect Weapon*]

*****

Staff of the Ice Mage

+50 Intelligence, Wisdom

30% Bonus damage when casting ice spells

Cold Snap

Bonded

*****

“What about you?” Fowl asked, turning to see Cordellia fighting back the tears rolling down her cheeks. Her hands trembled as she held the quiver.

[*Inspect Quiver*]

*****

Quiver of Slaying

+50 Constitution, Dexterity

20% Faster arrow flight speed

Slaying Arrow

Bonded

*****

“What the hell is a slaying arrow?”

Swallowing, Cordellia turned to Fowl, and her face lit up. Her cheeks started to rise as she grinned.

“Once a week, I can summon an arrow that does twice the normal damage,” she replied.

The quiver glowed blue for a moment, and an arrow appeared in it. Slowly pulling it out, she showed it to everyone.

Its clear crystal head radiated with a slight hum, and its solid blue shaft had crystal feather quills.

“That’s impressive,” Max said as he smiled at their ranger. “I can only imagine what that, with your ability, will do to someone or something.

Chuckling, Cordellia nodded and carefully slid the arrow back into the quiver and put it on her hip. After a second, she put the arrow into her storage and filled the quiver with normal ones.

“No point in keeping that out until I need it.”

Max nodded, and Fowl turned to Batrire, who was rolling her eyes at him even as she grinned, every tooth on display through her beard.

[*Inspect Pants*]

*****

Pants of the Priestess

+40 Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom

+20% Healing increase on all healing spells

Disciples Blessing

Bonded

*****

“Holy elf–”

A hand to the back of Fowl’s head from Tanila stopped him, but Batrire nodded.

“That spell has a one-week cool down, but it will give everyone a temporary twenty-percent boost to their stats for five minutes!” she exclaimed.

Smiling, Max saw that Cordellia had taken a step back and was looking at the four of them.

“You ok?”

His question caused everyone to turn and face their ranger who was nodding slowly.

“I’m not asking. I’m just pointing out something. Loot like this doesn’t drop this early. We’re easily getting stuff that’s only dropped in the upper forty levels. Tell me we realize this.”

Everyone nodded.

“It’s always been this way for us,” Max said. “We’ve never told anyone because… well, it wouldn’t be safe. How many would kill to have what you now own? Can’t you tell the difference between your power?”

She nodded and pointed at the chest.

“And there are still five other items.”

Fowl snapped his fingers and laughed.

“You’re right! I forgot! One for each of us!”

Max grabbed their warrior’s shoulder, stopping him as he turned back to the chest and watched Cordelllia’s face change.

She bit her lip as her head slowly bobbed up and down.

“We could do it… we could actually pass the fiftieth floor,” she muttered. Glancing up at the other four, she saw that everyone was nodding. “Seriously, if our items keep coming like this… we could go past the fiftieth floor!”

“That’s the plan,” Tanila said, moving to where the other elf was still struggling to realize it was possible. Putting a hand on her shoulder, their mage smiled. “Thuyja must have a reason for this. I’m not certain what it is, but we shall see it through.”

Lost in the moment, Cordellia laughed, flung her arms around Tanila, and shook her happily. When she realized what had happened, she turned bright red, setting down the woman she knew was royalty.

“Forgive me, I–”

“It’s okay,” Tanila replied, grabbing the ranger and repeating the same embrace. “I’m just as excited even if I don’t show it.”

Groaning, Fowl ran his hand down his face, tugging on his beard.

“Can we get back to the loot?”

“Someone make this dwarf happy, and let’s go loot the stuff in the chest.”

Everyone groaned as Batrire spoke but moved to join the dwarven warrior who was bouncing like a kid in a candy store by the chest.

“One each, right?” he asked, his fingers dangling near one of the items.

“Yes, go ahead.”

With permission from his love, Fowl touched an X, and everyone waited for the timer to end. When it did, a black box of about six square inches appeared in his hand.

“What the hell is this?” Fowl asked, turning it over and inspecting it from each angle.

“Does inspecting it show anything?”

Shaking his head at Max, the dwarf dropped it on the ground, causing Batrire to gasp as it hit the frozen ground.

“Fowl Hammerfall! What the hell are you thinking?!”

Wincing, he picked it up and checked it, seeing it wasn’t even scratched.

“Sorry, just testing something.”

Tanila moved forward and touched one, receiving the same thing. Seeing Max’s questioning glance, she shook her head.

Batrire and Cordellia both ended up with a matching one.

When his box touched his hand, Max jerked back.

Do you know what that is?!

Realizing the others were staring at him, Max tried inspecting it, seeing nothing come up at all, not a single notification.

[*Inspect Item*]

*****

?????

Bonded

*****

No, how could I–

Put those away. Do not take them out or reveal them to anyone!

What are they though? And why are you shouting?

Max's head hurt from that last command, and if he hadn't acquired the Formidable Mind skill, he wasn't sure he could have resisted the desire to store it immediately.

Artifacts. I haven't seen one of those in ages. You need three more. When you acquire them, I will show you how to activate them. Until then, none of you must ever let someone know of their existence. Now, please! Store them immediately!

"Put them away, quickly."

Max's tone wasn't the typical request, but everyone immediately stored the black boxes, staring at him with a look of confusion.

"Should I ask?"

Frowning, Max took a breath and sighed. He could feel their looks and knew Cordellia had no idea what was going on. The others knew his skill must have told him something and were wondering what he had just learned.

"Find an item, a bag, something, and store that inside it. Lock it away so that no one will ever see it," Max said, his face grim and hard. "We need three more each. When one of us owns four total, then I can help. However…"

Pausing, he turned and faced each of them, slowly shifting his gaze and reading their scared and confused expressions.

"From what I've been told and know, those boxes will get you killed by anyone who knows what they are without hesitation."

Even Tanila's head moved back at that statement.

"You're saying these are more powerful than everything else we have gotten?"

Looking at Cordellia, Max nodded.

"Not yet, but in time when you have enough, or… if you have enough. Imagine you showed it to the King of the Elves, hoping to earn favor from him. Perhaps you thought he might reward you. The only reward you would get would be a painful death as he made certain you had no more on you and tortured you to find where any more might be."

Turning to Fowl and Batrire, he nodded at them.

"The same would be for your King or my Queens. Even our own Faction would be a potential death zone, and we aren't strong enough to face what would come our way."

The joy of the moment was gone, replaced with a dread that began to take root in their hearts.

"Can't we leave it? Or what if we–"

"No," Max said, shaking his head.

Cordellia stopped talking and nodded slowly.

“Trust me. There are very few things I know about, and I wish this weren’t true, but no matter what, we cannot tell anyone about them. Does everyone understand?”

Every head moved up and down, and Max turned, retrieving the crystals.

As the chest disappeared, a portal appeared five yards away.

“I’m sorry to ruin our moment. Let’s go home and celebrate. We’re done with our first set of floors.”

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Sitting in the carriage right outside the gate for the Faction entrance, Max looked at everyone, their faces still a bit heavy from the conversation they had been partaking in.

“Smile, laugh, rejoice. Those are our main focus. Acting like this will draw attention, and we don’t need that.”
Everyone gave one last nod, putting on their best smile.

When they returned before dinner, the Faction house was abuzz with excitement. All of them smiled and acknowledged the completion of the tower floor.

Tom had announced a quick round of drinks for the faction, and those who were around came: forty-plus members, all celebrating their success.

Dexic eyed Max but smiled, even though her eyes still had questions. She wanted answers, and it appeared Everett had not given her enough.

“She’s not looked away once,” Tanila whispered as they chatted with others. “Is there a problem?”

“I doubt it, but eventually, I’m sure there will be. I’m still working on a plan for dealing with her.”

After about an hour of sharing the story of what they faced, Tom and the party moved downstairs to deal with the items they had acquired on the boss floor.

“You’re all much tamer than I thought you might be,” Everett said as they gazed at everything spread across the two stone tables.

Fowl had managed to secure the bottom half of the boss’s leg and the horn Max had broken off. Hundreds of smaller horns rested upon the table, piled high and flowing onto the floor.

“You all realize how much you accomplished, right?”

Everyone bobbed their head.

“Fowl, you mind going over the last of the details with Tom? I need to ask Everett something in private.”

Without missing a beat, both men moved to the clipboard with all the items listed and verified that nothing was out of order.

“I changed my mind,” Max whispered. “I want to make some items.”

A small smile appeared on the leader's face, and he nodded slowly.

“Can I ask why?”

“You and I both know that stats are important, just like skills. One is easier to come by, and it seems foolish not to use both. Besides, I’m thinking of how I might improve for all of us.”

Stroking his chin, Everett glanced at the others from his group and saw how they were standing.

“Did everything go okay? I mean, you said it was a tough fight.”

“These foes were smarter, building a wall of ice to lift Fowl up and then hit him, using the walls to block spells, going after the stronger opponent, and more. Everything was harder, and without stats to combat that, even ten points would mean a massive difference. You know that.”

Pointing at the three crystals resting on the table, Max watched Everett’s eyes.

“Tell me those have to be worth getting to craft something. You know I’ll also gladly craft for the rest of the Faction.”

A piece of paper appeared in the older man’s hand, and he handed it to Max.

“Here’s my list. Every two you make for me, you can make one for your team, but just know, I can only allow one legendary item per ten you make for me, so choose wisely.”

Max nodded, taking the list and scanning it, trying not to wince at what he saw.

“You’ve got some serious needs,” he replied. “And you want me to not make anything but a mythical grade on most of this?”

Everett started to stare at the ceiling and then sighed.

“Baldin was a good weapon crafter, but even he struggled to make what you did so easily. He had the same skill as you, yet ninety-eight percent of what he made was mythical at best. How you managed to make those elemental cores bind as you did boggles my mind. I’ve seen countless failures. Even the ones that worked, the stats were never as good as the quality wasn’t as high.”

Turning his attention back to Max, Everett shrugged.

“I’m learning not to ask how or why but to wonder what you are going to be able to accomplish. Tom is fine, realizing that you have your secrets. Just as I mentioned, we

all have ours. Just know if I could pledge to you that unless you actively attempt to hurt our Faction, I won’t betray you or your group.”

Smiling softly, Max nodded once and then pointed at his team.

“Their family, even Cordellia.”
“As it should be.”

Both watched and listened as laughter came, especially when Fowl shared again how their ranger had used Tom’s training to shoot so many giants in the eyes, blinding them over and over.

“Let me tell them I need to work, and I’ll start on a few of these tonight. We’ll take tomorrow off and then focus on finishing up our tower level.”

“How close are you? I mean to level ten?”
Smacking his lips, Max grinned.

“You sure you want to know?”

“No,” he replied, shaking his head, “but I really need to know. The suspense kills me.”
“We’re almost level nine, and Cordellia is capped out, so it's moving faster. Once we're all ten, I'll give you every yellow gem we get. Once we hit fifty, we’ll grind through the levels again.”

“Almost nine,” Everett said, his voice low and in shock. “That's… unheard of. Surely, the gods must have a hand-painted picture of you hanging on their wall to bless you with that kind of luck.”

“While a band of elf zealots is passing out papers with a hand-drawn sketch of me, trying to get me killed.”

Both of them laughed and moved back to where the party was, listening to Tom share a story of his old tower-climbing days. For a moment, things were as all adventurers desired.

Tanila watched Max occasionally, reading the book she had, watching as he worked the different items simultaneously. His mind could see everything he needed and how to use the time best. While one piece allowed magic to settle inside, he could focus on working another. Time flew by, and soon, Max noticed his favorite elf standing a few feet away, watching him twist wood together with a skill that seemed impossible to believe.

“How much longer?”

He heard the exhaustion in her voice, looked up, and smiled.

“Another hour? Maybe two tops, but you can head upstairs and go to sleep. After this one, I’ll store the other two and work on them another day.”

She nodded, hid the yawn she could not hold back behind her hand, and winked at him.

“Oh, I want to see the final product. I also want to be there when Everett gives Batrire the staff.”

She moved back to her seat and watched as Max continued to work. Using his own magic combined with the skill inside him, he made the wood gathered from trees in a higher dungeon move with ease.

She doesn’t have any idea how you are doing this because you haven’t told her.

Max ignored the voice, but it was right. He hadn’t mentioned to Tanila that he had been getting guidance from his skill.

No point in making her more anxious. You know how she feels about you… or the threat of what you are.

Neither spoke for a moment as Max worked, lost in the beauty of what he was doing.

I am at a loss. No matter what I have tempted you with, bribed you to do, forced your hand by, or put in your way, you don’t react like every other being that has ever possessed me. It didn’t matter what creature it was, the power I offer, what they can become is too much to resist, and yet… somehow you do. You are different, Max Hoste. Why?

Twisting the wood again, making the cord of branches he was shaping together even tighter and stronger, Max took a moment to consider his answer.

I don’t want power for myself. I only seek it when it allows me to protect those I care about. Had you gone to someone else, I can’t begin to imagine what this world would be like. Think about an elf who hates humans. How many would they have slain, and how strong would they have become? Every time I kill someone, I feel a part of me is changed, and… that’s what scares me.

Do you have any idea how many beings have died at the hands of the strong? How many worlds have been destroyed by a god because they were upset or bored? Yet what are you going to do when faced against one of my brethren? Will you fight against them? Will you attempt to consume them?

His hand almost slipped, and Max took a deep breath, focusing on the work he was doing. Even now, the weapon he made was for their healer, and the goal was to help her be stronger and able to keep everyone alive. Everett understood and agreed it was a great choice.

He had considered making Fowl a weapon, but right now, Batrire needed a little extra help. Her healing was good, but as their hitpoints grew and the damage they received also went up, the scaling of her heals had fallen off.

If they threaten my family or me, then yes.

A chuckle came and then stopped quickly.

Stop that. Get the essence.

Max saw that the skill was right. It was time to attempt what he had been preparing for.

“You’ll want to watch and see,” he said, glancing up at Tanila, who looked ready to doze off.

She moved forward quickly, storing her book.

From the box on the worktable, Max withdrew a light essence. The Faction only had three, and he would only get one chance at this, but even though he didn’t have the magic for it, he felt that it wouldn’t matter.

Slowly, he traced the runes he had carved in the different branches before hand-binding them together. A white light began to glow inside them, and the wood almost started to hum.

Over and over, he repeated the process until the final moment came.

Slide it inside and then tighten it down.

His weapon crafting skill and Consume skill told him the same thing.

Using his fingers, he ignored the pain of the essence and wedged it between the small hole he had left in the middle of the staff. A bit of pressure was there, fighting to move between, and then it popped inside, sending a wave of magic through the wood.

Picking up his tools and putting the wood back into the vice, he began twisting and closing up the staff. Each time, the lines continued to pulse slightly.

Right there, that’s the spot, right?

Yes. Use your magic and pour some in. Slowly.

Max grabbed the top of the staff and then put his hand over the spot where the wood widened slightly. Holding the essence inside, he began channeling his earth magic into the wood.

Tanila’s eyes widened as she saw what he was doing.

Unable to watch her, Max stared at the staff, watching the brown wood turn a shade of green on some branches. More power flooded into it, and then suddenly, he felt the weapon shift in his hand.

[5 Experience]

[Legendary Staff Created]

Six sticks he had used were now green, the other six still brown, each wound together in a weave that looked like someone had braided hair or a cord.

The white runes were starting to fade, and at the top of the staff, a single green leaf was there for a moment.

Touching it with his finger, the leaf wilted and fell toward the floor, dust before it ever met the stone blocks.

“That was… did you use magic? Earth magic?”

Sighing, Max nodded and held the staff out to her.

“You inspect it. I’m not a fan of checking the first time.”

Tanila’s hands trembled slightly as he handed it to her, and she gripped it tightly.

“Seth… it's unbelievable.”

[*Inspect Staff*]

*****

Legendary Light Staff

+ 60 Constitution, Intelligence

+ 10% Healing increase on all healing spells

*****

“Batrire is going to love this.”

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Batrire cried for almost half an hour after Everett gave her the staff Max had made the next morning.

Even through tired eyes, both Tanila and he had smiled and cheered with her, seeing the excitement.

Once they were done, they spent the rest of the day farming different levels in the tower, collecting gems on the first and second floors.

The lizardmen on the first floor fell faster than any of them had thought they might, and they were now able to easily use Max’s special farming technique of pulling a hundred at a time.

After clearing the first floor and being sad that no rare spawns were there, the party reached the second floor and found it to be filled with demonic dogs.

Max had hoped he would acquire souls, yet none came. Before two hours had passed, each of them was now level ten in the tower.

When dinner ended and everyone headed to their rooms to retire, Max moved back to the crafting area of the Faction, working on completing his list so he could focus on his next item.

After finishing three and having four started, he went to bed and found Tanila waiting for him.

“Why did you stay up?”

“My usual furnace wasn’t next to me, and I couldn’t sleep. Besides, I have a few things on my mind since you shared with me what your skill told you. I’ve been researching and will visit the Elvin library the next day we have off. Only once in my life can I recall my father ever mentioning an artifact. I also tested the binding stone, and your skill was right. I can’t remove it.”

Max chuckled as he moved to the bathroom to get clean.

“You didn’t believe *Bob,”* he mouthed silently, earning a chuckle from his favorite elf.

“I was just thinking that if it worked, we could decide who gets it. Why would one item be different from the rest? My real fear is what an artifact really would be like?”

Max had spent many hours wondering about that same thing, and his skill never gave him an answer. The only thing he knew was that it was apparently strong enough that people would kill their own mother or child for them.

“From what I’d assume, something stronger than the top item in the tower,” Max replied. “Even better than the chest Fowl had got for a few floors. And most likely permanent.”

She nodded and dozed until Max returned, and they slept till morning.

“We’re ready,” Fowl said with a grin. “Floor level ten.”

Moving through the portal, each of them found themselves standing in a hallway with massive walls rising up and almost out of sight. A fog covered the worked stone with overgrown weeds, and the space between the walls was about yards. Darkness was above, and stones in the wall glowed with a soft yellow light, illuminating the path just enough to provide a few feet of darkness between the light of the next stone along the way.

“What the heck is this?”

Max glanced at the hallway and saw how it ran forward, then came to a T, with one path going right and the other going left.

“Maze?”

Cordellia winced and hissed.

“Those do take place, and some have been known to take weeks to get through, just trying to find the path out.”

“A maze,” their mage said, tapping her chin. She glanced up and then at Max. Do you think you could reach the top if there is one?”

“Maybe. I have time and can come down if I can’t reach it. Batrire, can I get some rope?”

Nodding, their healer grinned. She held her new staff in one hand while pulling out pouches of rope and tossing them to Max with the other.

Secretly, inside, Max couldn't help but smile, seeing how excited she was about the gift Everett and Tom had given her. One day, secrets wouldn't be needed anymore, and they were on that path right now.

Storing the rope, Max moved to Tanila and gave her a quick kiss before activating Sider Walk.

In a moment he was running up the wall and soon disappeared out of sight in the darkness.

Moving at full speed and letting his sonar guide him, Max traveled for almost a minute before reaching the top of the wall. Slowing down, he climbed on top of it and found it was only about four feet wide, and there was still no light. Everything was pitch black, and his sonar revealed a few of the other hallways from up here.

Pulling out a lightstone, he held it up, feeling the oppressive blanket of darkness that kept the light from reaching more than a few yards.

Something suddenly came toward him from above and to the right, traveling fast as it pierced the outer edge of his sonar.

Storing his light orb and pulling out his new weapon, Max felt the flying shape of what he wanted to call a bird but wasn't sure what it was turn, gliding along the edge of his fifty-yard range before heading back toward the area Max assumed was the main section of of the maze.

The creature had feathers, three heads, and long wings that were at least five feet long. Overall, it was hard to imagine what it could be, as it had never looked like anything he had seen before.

Six thin legs with three sets of claws on each foot had been aimed in his direction.

With time ticking down and the chance of them being able to actually cheat and use the top of the maze looking impossible, Max got his feet set on the side he had climbed up and ran down.

"So cheating isn't an option. How about going through the walls?"

Pulling out a pick axe, Max swung with everything he had, causing a small two-inch chip to appear.

"That would be a lot of mining," Max told Fowl. "I'm pretty sure the only way to do this is the hard way."

Grumbling, Fowl nodded, and after everyone decided to give it a go, they went to the right.

"Every turn, we go right. Eventually, we'll have to find ourselves back here or the exit," their mage informed them. Max marked each turn with a chip on the corner of the stone.

Hours passed, and no monster appeared as they traveled, finding nothing but weeds and gravel on the worked stones.

“Is this really just a maze? I mean, without monsters? How boring is that?”

Max grunted at their warrior, putting a pickaxe strike to the corner as Fowl slowly continued leading.

“This is what makes mazes so difficult,” Cordellia stated. “Even if you don’t have monsters, you’re stuck trying to get out. Once you commit to it, the only other option is to go back the way you came.”

After twelve hours everyone was mentally exhausted.

Setting camp in a corner, Max took the first watch, and Fowl started building a fire with materials he had taken from his storage.

“I need a hot meal,” Fowl muttered as he stoked the flames that Tanila started for him with her magic.

About ten seconds after the fire started, Max sensed an object coming toward them through the hallways from above.

Casting an Earth wall immediately, he shouted, “Air wall!”

Tanila didn’t hesitate, immediately casting one above the earth wall he had formed off the side of the bricks over their heads.

Fowl’s shield was out and over his head as a massive stone fell against the spot where everyone was gathered around the fire.

“Put it out!”
Max shouted as another rock came hurtling toward them. He cast an air wall, and Tanila quenched the fire with her ice magic.

“To me!”

Everyone raced toward the spot Max was at, leaving their tent they had pulled out and the chairs as a dozen more rocks streamed down every ten seconds or so. Each one was the size of a dwarf and clacked and clattered against the stone and the walls.

Finally, when the boulders stopped coming, everyone glanced up at the dark expanse above.

“What was that?!” exclaimed Batrire as she looked at where her chair was crushed beneath a pile of boulders.

“That’s my fault,” Max replied. “I didn’t even think about them being attracted to a fire or a light. I guess the stones on the walls don’t bother them, but whatever type of birds they are, they attack any other light.”

“If you couldn’t sense that, I would have been a dwarf pancake,” Fowl said slowly. “What are we going to do now?”

“Let’s move one more hallway and find another dead end. We can set up camp there with just the tent I have. After that, I’ll stand guard, but no fires. Just jerky and water.”

Sighing, Fowl nodded, and everyone prepared for battle, not knowing if something might come from where the monsters had attacked.

When everyone woke up after about six hours, Max was tired but still able to function. He read books, letting his sonar help him protect what he loved, knowing a night's sleep wasn’t worth losing his friends if something attacked no one else might notice.

“Let’s go,” Max said, storing his tent and yawning.

“You sure you don’t need a nap?” Tanila asked, biting her lip afterward.

“I’ll be fine. Tonight, I’ll take a turn sleeping.”

“Tonight,” Fowl huffed. “I’m not sure what time it is.”

Seven days passed, and the group looked ragged.

Max had facial hair growing, and Batrire definitely needed waxing.

The smell of their clothes and outfits reminded the rest, unlike Cordellia, who had ten pairs of clothes in storage, that they needed to bring more outfits.

A low hum came from ahead, and it took everything in their power as they wanted to race down the hallway they were in.

“The portal!” Fowl exclaimed as he pointed at it and started to run.

Max dashed forward, grabbed him by the back of his plate armor, and stopped him.

“Wait… just wait.”

Groaning, Fowl let himself be pulled back as they stared at the room that opened up from the end of the hall. It went from the ten-yard-wide hallway to a massive fifty-foot-wide and hundred-yard-long room.

Bricks of light were scattered around the floor in a seemingly random area, creating shadows and lighted areas.

“What are you thinking?”

Max moved as close as he could to the edge of the room, stretching his sonar. He could see a hallway coming off the other side of the open space and wondered if there had always been two paths.

Nothing felt off. No hidden monsters of any kind.

“We go slow. I’ll lead, keep your shield ready, and be prepared to cast defenses.”

Glancing at everyone and ignoring their bag-laden eyes, he saw them nod.

In a moment, everyone had refocused on the task of being prepared for what might come.

Each step felt excruciating as they inched closer to the portal, wondering if rocks or birds might attack from above. Nothing came as they reached the halfway point between the portal.

The bubble his sonar created in the room showed nothing above or around, and Max wanted to relax, but he couldn’t.

Finally reaching the edge of the portal, he motioned for everyone to run in, and once Cordellia had gone in, he went through himself.

Sunlight hit their faces, assaulting their eyes as they appeared outside the tower on the pad everyone came out on.

Covering their eyes, they blinked and let their vision return slowly, sighing and feeling the warmth of the sun.

“I’ve never wanted to strip naked and let every inch of light touch me,” Fowl said, standing there now in just a pair of leather pants.

“Please! Remain clothed!” a guard shouted as they ran over toward them. “We are in public, and I will fine you!”

Fowl looked at the woman who didn’t appear to appreciate his hairy chest and toes, squinting through his eyes as he held a hand over them.

“How much is the fine?”

“What?” she asked, confused for a moment. “It’s five gold!”

Nodding, Fowl smiled and held out his arms, closing his eyes, and lay on the ground.

“Seems worth it,” he muttered, laughing when the guard growled.

“Forgive us, please,” Cordellia said quickly. “We’ve been in a maze for so long I’m not certain how many days it has been. It was dark, and we couldn’t even light a fire without monsters coming.”

Snorting, the guard frowned and nodded.

“Five minutes, and then I’ll fine him for twenty gold! What if a child came here and saw that? They’d have nightmares for life!”

Fowl sat up, scowling at the guard who was grinning, as the rest of the party nodded.

“She’s right,” Batrire said. “Somethings are best not to ruin a child's innocence.”

After a few minutes, everyone decided that since the day was half over, a walk through the city would be better than climbing into a cramped carriage.

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“I’m an idiot and a fool!” Tom exclaimed after making sure everyone was okay. “We’ve been worried sick, and after two days, we sent a party in to check on that floor. Once they saw that it was a maze, they came back and told us.”

Everett handed Max and the others each a ring while their trainer spoke.

“It will work for five minutes at most. Only one of you should use it at a time. Tom and I never thought about giving you one yet since you managed to defeat the tower floor every day. Now, it appears that this is a lesson learned for us all.”

Everyone nodded, storing the rings and laying on the blankets they had spread out on the ground outside.

“I felt like I was going crazy,” Fowl muttered. “I’m fine being underground, but not being able to have a fire was horror. And I didn’t even have enough ale past the first night!”

Max said nothing, lying on the ground, enjoying the warmth of the sun.

A few minutes passed, and then someone was poking his side.

“Wake up, it’s been an hour.”

Rubbing his eyes, Max saw that the sun had gone down and was almost set. The temperature had dropped, but it didn’t bother him. Tanila was smiling and looking at him.

“Where are the others?”

“Inside, bathing, going to eat, and then sleep. I’m certain we all could use a good night's rest in our own bed.”

“And no tower climbing tomorrow.”

She nodded and smiled.

“Correct. Now, let’s get you bathed. I hate to tell you this, but you reek.”

Laughing he rolled over and pretended to try and grab her, stopping when he caught his own scent of his armpit.

“Wow, that is awful.”

Chuckling, they walked just a few feet apart, content not to have to smell each other.

Two days passed, and the team stood outside the tower. Each of them felt better prepared with more clothes, food, water, and anything else they imagined would be needed.

“We ready for this?” their dwarven warrior joked.

“Get in there!” Batrire replied, shoving him closer to the portal.

As their eyes adjusted and the floor came into view, everyone heard a sigh of relief from their warrior.

Beneath them was a small bowl with a bright sun overhead, green grass, a gentle breeze, and what looked like a small village town.

“Sweet mother of Ockrim! Sunlight and outdoors!” Fowl exclaimed.

Once ready, the group set out, walking toward the town. They noticed no creatures or monsters outside in the area or that could be seen in town from where they were.

Max Stealthed, checking out the first few streets and houses, finding nothing inside.

“It’s like a ghost town,” Max said as he motioned down the street. “There’s a big building up ahead, but so far, I can’t find anything or hear anyone.”

“Is it just me or have these last two floors been a pain in the arse?”

Ignoring their warrior, they moved forward slowly, staying in formation and keeping an eye out for anything that might come their way.

In the center of town was a massive building, similar to the one in the minotaur town. Inside it was a mine elevator with working levers, ropes, and more.

“You have got to be kidding me!” Fowl shouted. “Another one?!”

Everyone groaned but knew Fowl was right. The idea of being underground wasn’t the idea anyone desired or wanted.

“Welcome to tower climbing,” Cordellia said with a groan.

“We’re doing it,” Batrire muttered when Fowl spun and frowned at them.

“But -””

“We’re doing it.”

Nodding, he turned and moved to the platform, standing on it and making sure that after a few jumps, it didn’t break apart.

“Fine, let's go.”

“You ever worked one of these?” Max asked as he stood next to Fowl.

“Yeah, it's simple. Pull the lever down, and you go down. Move it up… well, there ya go.”

When everyone was ready, Fowl pulled the lever down, and the lift started descending. Yards of dirt and rock passed by as light stones turned on around the edge of the elevator. Finally, the dirt vanished and they found themselves being lowered into a dark chasm, absent of light.

“Oh, hell no!” Fowl muttered, throwing the switch upward.

The elevator continued to lower and their dwarf started to freak out, sliding it up and down, trying to get it to stop.

Objects began to appear in Max's sonar range, and he realized that bats, at least five feet long, were flying around them.

"Incoming! Bats! Tanila fireball that way!"

His bow appeared, and Max started shooting arrows. Strange screeches came as his arrows hit their targets in the area without light.

Tanila's fireball launched outward as they descended, and shrieks came as the light of it flew across the cavern, allowing everyone to see there appeared to be hundreds of bats with massive long teeth, red eyes, and claws on the end of their wings flapping around.

"No! No!" Fowl muttered when the handle snapped off.

"Get it together!" Batrire said as she bonked him on the helm with her staff. "Protect us and stop whining!"

Every second, Max continued firing off arrows and occasionally he would send up a fireball, allowing Cordellia to shoot a few as the light provided her vision of the bats.

Shrieks continued to echo through the cavern as the ones they shot fell toward the ground. A hundred arrows had been fired by Max and at least thirty by their ranger when the speed of the elevator slowed and a thud came as it touched down.

When the base reached the ground, a clicking sound came, and two lights appeared by the front entrance of the platform. About five seconds later another click sounded and two more lights about ten yards away lit up. Clicking continued, slowly picking up speed until a trail of two lights, twenty yards apart, barely illuminated a path through a winding area deep underground.

Glancing up, they could barely see the place they had come from, almost like a tiny moon that added no light at all.

"Seth?"

Max was busy firing arrows and sending out fireballs, and the kills he acquired gave him mana to keep up his magical assault.

"We need to move! I can feel them swarming this platform, and I'm not sure–"

Another clicking sound came, and the lights on the platform were turned off.

When they did, a loud shriek pierced their ears, and Max felt the presence of all the bats coming closer.

"Fire Nova! Move!"

Tanila began casting her spell, and everyone followed Max as they moved toward the two lights.

Her flames erupted outward, providing a blazing light that showed hundreds of bats swarming near them, screeching in pain for those who got close and suffered injury.

Standing at the first area of lights, Max made sure the others were between him and Fowl.

The clang of their dwarf's mace against something leathery told Max he had managed to hit the one he sensed coming.

More were around them, flying nearby, waiting for something.

Another click came, and both lights they were at went off.

"RUN!"

Casting Fire Nova, Max and the others dashed toward the second light, getting another glimpse of the bats that were descending upon them in the darkness.

"Ogre nuts!" Fowl shouted as he fought off one that was coming in toward Batrire. "What do we do?"

"We run!" Max shouted. Cordellia, just keep shooting in the air. You'll hit something. It's so thick up there, something will die!"

The sounds of the bats eating the bodies of their fallen kind filled their ears, and everyone started jogging along the lighted trail, trying to make sure they didn't trip on the rocky floor.

"That trail goes on for miles!" Cordellia shouted as she fired arrow after arrow into the darkness above.

"I know! But we can't stay here!"

They had passed about eight lights when a click sounded out over the chaos above, the second set of lights on the trail going dark.

Max thought he had been prepared, having three hundred arrows, yet he was almost out, and Cordellia tossed him a pack with another two hundred.

"Fireball!"

Tanila's spell illuminated the darkness, and Batrire cursed this time, seeing that the horde was still just as thick as it had been an hour before.

"We're still running! How much further?" Fowl asked as he jogged.

There were still miles of lights ahead, and the clicking sound came every ten seconds. He knew they were ahead by a few miles, but the biggest concern was how long this might go on.

"We're slowly moving upward! I'm not sure how fast though! How many more arrows?"

Cordellia sent a few more going and said nothing for a moment.

"Maybe a thousand? We've shot well over that many already."

Max grunted and knew that it was true. Fowl had commented the experience was great, always the one to watch that bar and ignore the rest of the chaos around them.

As he tried to weigh his thoughts, the clicking noise changed and became slightly faster. Now, it was every five seconds.

“Seth…”

He knew the concern in Batrire’s voice. Her speed was the slowest, followed by Tanila.

“I can carry you all but I’m not certain how all this works! Does the time of the lights going out change as we get further? Is it based on how long it’s been or how far we have traveled?”

“You need to decide something,” Tanila replied. “If we keep this pace, I’m going to run out of mana soon, and you’ll have to do everything.”

Frowning, Max knew that was the problem. He wasn’t sure how much damage those bats would do one at a time, but if everyone were swarmed with the thousand or more, he knew had to be up there. Eventually, the claws and teeth would find tender, meaty parts, even on their plated warrior.

“Ok, you three get near each other. I’m going to grab you all. Fowl I’m going to need you to hold out your arms again.”

He heard the grumble from their warrior, certain no one else did, but Fowl knew the choices were limited.

When the three women had gotten into a small triangle position, he moved forward, tossing Batrire over his shoulder first, ignoring her grunt before setting Cordellia on top of her. Tanila ended up on his right shoulder, and he moved quickly, grabbing Fowl from underneath his arms.

“Hang on!”

[Haste]

As if he were a rock fired from a siege weapon, Max raced forward, feeling the presence of all the bats that had been swarming them left behind. Occasionally, a few might appear at the upper limits of his height for the sonar skill but none were really out ahead of where they had been. Instead, all of the bats were clustered together and waiting for a warm meal.

Lights flew by so fast it was almost enough to make him dizzy.

“I may vomit!” Fowl muttered.

“Close your eyes!” he shouted, not wanting the splatter if that happened to hit him in the face.

With a new dexterity of over two hundred, he ran faster than before and wished he could actually calculate it. Instead, every second was spent focusing on where his feet touched down, avoiding small rocks and little raised pieces of stone in the rising elevation, and trying to figure out just how much further he had to go.

The thirty seconds was almost over, and up ahead, the trail of lights ended about a mile away.

Halfway before they reached the spot, his haste failed, and he almost tripped.

“I can see it!” Fowl shouted! The lights are ending!”

“SETH! RUN!”

The way Tanila shouted forced him to run as fast as possible and not risk looking behind.

All around the cavern, a continual click rang out in a nonstop sound. It was almost as if someone was trying to see how fast they could hit a drum using both hands.

Their mage shifted on his shoulder, and he could see the light behind him of a fireball being sent off, with loud shrieks coming a moment later.

Then he sensed it as the walls got closer to the lights. Before, he had been in a cavern, now, they were running toward a passage, and all along the walls were holes in the rocks. Each click opened a gate, and from that came dozens of bats.

“Hurry!” Fowl shouted.

Max felt his dwarven friend now holding his shield out before them.

They were ten seconds from the ending of the torches and a dark hole.

[Fire Nova]

Racing, the spell went off when he was halfway to the hole, shrieks and wails coming from all around. The light of his fire that pulsed out from him three times burnt hundreds, and the dark hole before them was just ahead.

“DOOR!” Fowl shouted, and Max knew he was right. He felt it with his vision.

“Sorry!” Max shouted.

[Power Strike]

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

I can't remember if I mentioned this but I finished book 6 and wow my beta readers have said its the best one yet...

Going to start book 7 soon and I'm working on another small series real slowly!

Looking forward to book 4 out Sept 1st and wanted to say thanks again all of you who comment and love on the story every day!

211 - Crafting & Preparing 211 - Crafting & Preparing - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG (Book 4 Stubs 8/29!) | Royal Road

The door shattered into countless pieces, and Max ignored the shards that flew at his face. Four steps later, he was in a room, and the sound of a gate came from behind, slowly cutting off anything coming through the ten-foot tunnel they had just run through.

“Seth!”

Coming to a full stop in about three seconds, Max set the group down and spun, watching as lights began to appear, streaming all around the cavern in an upward circular motion.

“Stairs!” their dwarven warrior shouted.

They all saw the stairs. At the top was a bright light coming through an open door.

“Tell me this isn’t a race!” Batrire exclaimed as she cast a healing spell on herself.

“I’m not sure, but let’s go, Fowl, you’re first!” Max exclaimed.

Each of them moved quickly, with Fowl leading Tanila and their healer in the middle. A single metal rail was there as the four-foot-wide section of stairs spiraled around the thirty-yard-wide room.

Everyone grunted and huffed as they moved quickly, unsure what would happen next.

Five minutes later, they ran out of the darkness and into an open field, the gentle breeze blowing the green grass and the sun providing warmth and light. Thirty yards away stood the portal and a small black chest.

No one spoke, breathing hard and panting, trying to catch their breath as they stumbled toward the chest and portal.

“I hate stairs,” Batrire finally got out, wiping the sweat from her face. “My legs… too short.”

Cordellia and Max both grinned, each having the easiest time with the stairs.

“So we won? I mean… like it’s over?”

Max shrugged at their warrior and pointed at the portal.

“I doubt most others could do it like we did. What scares me is how another group would pass that. There could have been ten thousand bats in there.”

“It did seem to scale off the speed at which you moved though,” Cordellia said. “Once you hit a certain point and speed, the lights behind us caught up pretty quickly. Who knows. Maybe fighting wasn’t the best option at all.”

Fowl had moved and was standing by the small black chest. It was about a third of the normal-sized ones they got from killing a boss in the tower.

“Anyone care if I open it?”

“Go for it,” Max said. “Hopefully, it’s not a mimic.”

Instinctively, their warrior took a step away before glaring at Max, the others laughing at the Fowl’s expense.

He moved closer once more and lifted the lid.

“Wow… that’s unexpected.”

Fowl reached in, pulled out a small pouch, dropped it on the ground, and repeated that process over and over.

Soon, fifteen pouches were on the ground.

Batrire had picked one up, and once Fowl had stopped pulling them out, she opened it, and her eyes went wide.

“Gems! Green tower gems!”

She pulled one out and held it up, crushing it between her fingers and smiled as the power flowed into her.

“There has to be about a hundred in this pouch. Which means… we killed over fifteen hundred?” their archer asked.

Fowl opened a pouch and popped one, grinning at the sensation he felt.

“I guess that sounds right,” Max said as he looked at Tanila and Cordellia, the three of them having done most of the killing.

“Oh my gosh! I’m level sixty now!” their ranger exclaimed. “All that experience!”

“Holy elf…” Fowl stopped when he saw the looks from both elves and sighed. I’m almost fifty-eight, like just a sliver away.”

Max laughed as everyone grabbed a pouch and started smashing gems between their fingers.

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“I guess that floor made up for the last one,” Tanila said after everyone had finished crushing all the green gems. “We’re almost halfway to level eleven in the tower.”

Cordellia muttered something to herself, and Max turned to see her holding the last gem between her fingers.

“You ok?”

Blinking a few times, their ranger nodded and smiled.

“I’m level sixty! I’m also level eleven for the tower! Even better is we’re about to beat the eleventh floor!”

Her grin was infectious, and everyone started smiling, excited about what she was getting at. Everyone was improving rapidly.

“Now I just need to decide what skill I want to get. I may wait and talk to Tom. Surely he’d have some ideas.”

Everyone nodded and smiled, and Max pointed at the portal.

“I’m not sure about you all, but how about we head out? I feel the need to eat and drink something not from a waterskin.”

Without waiting, the group exited the tower floor.

***

Max spent three days working on weapons for the Faction while Tanila used her free time to visit the Elven library and tried to find more information about artifacts without drawing attention.

“You’ve done exceptionally well,” Everett said as he inspected the six weapons lying on the table. “Each of these will help our members in so many ways.”

“Glad to be of service. I’m almost done with Fowls, and then I’ll start working on more for the Faction list again. I did notice you have a legendary staff down there at the bottom of the list.”

Chuckling, Everett nodded as he slid his hand along the flat edge of the sword he held.

“After seeing what you made for Batrire, I realized I sometimes get a little excited about our offensive classes and need to make sure that our healers get the same love. Tell me, what did you find out from all the materials I’ve shown you the last few days?”

Max’s mind willed the book he wanted from storage, and when it appeared in his hand, he started to turn through it.

“There are a few materials that have potential, but I’m not certain if they are viable for what I want to do. That horn from the ice giant boss actually has a lot of potential for a legendary weapon. Just find the right metal to go with it, and you could have a superb ice-enchanted weapon.”

“Enough for a staff?” Everett asked.

Shaking his head from side to side, Max tried to let his mind and skill figure that question out.

“Maybe. I’d have to see what all we had, but with an ice core and some other things I remember seeing in your supplies, I could probably make something that would help a caster that focuses on that element.”

Pulling out his own journal, Everett made a few quick notes and then stored it.

“So then, what’s tomorrow? Floor number twelve?”

“Yup. I have no clue what’s going to be there, but at the end of the day, we’re doing what we can while trying to be safe. I will say that the last two floors prove your point. Things got harder.”

Snorting, Everett rolled his eyes.

“Wait until you reach the forties. I pray for your sake that you all get the gear you need because I watched a warrior get almost killed in one shot by a tower monster. It had two skills and actually broke the plate armor, destroying it completely.”

Max felt his eyes go wide at hearing that news.

“There’s skills that destroy armor?”

“Some of the monsters you have listed in that journal we gave will eat the flesh off you if they touch you. Others can cause a disease that reduces all your stats, and if your healer doesn’t cure you quickly, you can imagine what happens when something already stronger than you hits with a standard attack, let alone a charged one.”

Putting his book away, Max pulled out a different one and took out the torn piece of paper in it.

“This is for you. Tell me if you think I’m right on the numbers for the first nine floors.”

Everett’s eyes furrowed as he took the paper from Max, and then as he started reading the list, his mouth opened slightly, and he began to blink rapidly.

“How… how do you have these?”

“I take it I’m right?”

Everett coughed and slowly nodded, glancing up from the list at Max and then back down.

“We’ve got something similar, and the numbers are basically around these. Do I even want to know how you acquired this knowledge?”

Storing his books and tools, Max leaned against the workbench as he crossed his arms.

“I took what you said the other day seriously. I’ll share everything I can to help you and the Faction. You’ve shown me that you have our back, so I’ll hold back less from now on.”

A single eyebrow raised as Max said that, but the Faction leader said nothing.

Chuckling, Max nodded at the questioning look.

“As I'm sure you know, There is still stuff our group keeps secret, and while we reveal it, most probably won’t come until we’re at that fiftieth floor. Only because then, I know everyone will feel comfortable enough to deal with it. However, I’m going to help give things like notes and stats so that as new adventurers join, they are better prepared for what awaits.”

Everett moved a few steps and held out his hand. As Max shook it, the older man smiled.

“If I weren’t certain you have no desire to run this place, I’d almost offer you my position in a decade or two.”

Laughing, Max shook his head.

“No, thank you. The weight of leadership with just my team is hard enough. I can’t imagine what you deal with on a regular basis.”

Frowning, Everett’s face changed, getting harder as he bobbed it.

“We lost four people in the last two weeks. They were a group facing the boss on the thirty-fifth floor. Only one survived.”

“Sorry to hear,” was all Max could think of, trying to imagine how that must affect the man standing across from him.

“Thank you. I can see in your eyes that you’re serious about that. The only one who returned was their ranger. They used the stone the team had to escape, but it was too late…” Everett’s eyes lost some light as he stared at the stone floor, frowning for a moment. "One spell killed everyone that fast.”

Max stood there in silence, not wanting to talk for a moment, letting Everett have a minute to collect himself.

“It was a demon, and the ranger said it was upon them before anyone knew it. One moment, it was across the tower floor when they entered the temple it was in, and the next…”

Shuddering, Everett took a deep breath and put on a smile.

“Don’t worry about that for now. Just keep your team safe, and I’ll see if I can get a stone for your group just in case.”

Wincing, Max sucked a little air in through his teeth.

“Actually…”

The Faction leader's face went from pain and sadness to surprise, his head jerking back a few inches.

“You have a stone already?!”

Nodding, Max shrugged.

“We got it from a boss but felt mentioning it might sound bad at the time, so I forgot to tell you.”

“Well… I’m glad to hear you have one, but…” Everett paused as he considered that news. “If you get anything else out of the ordinary or extremely rare, should I expect you to keep it a secret as well?”

“I’ll try to let you know if I can, but did you tell your Faction leader everything you got?”

Laughing, the man shook his head and sighed.

“No… I can see your point,” he replied. “Very well, I’ll let you get back to your friends. Just remember, I’m always here if you need me.”

Nodding, Max moved toward the door and left Everett in the room with the weapons he had made. The older man picked up another and inspected it as Max left.

***

“So it appears my list is pretty accurate,” Max said as the five of them sat around a table in a warded planning room. “If I’m right, we’re going to start seeing bigger bosses and stronger normal monsters at some point. The highest stats seem to be going up at a consistent value.”

Tapping the paper facing Batrire, Fowl, and Cordellia, Max found his lines for floors eleven and twelve blank.

“Without anything to really fight and knowing that our last floor wasn’t based on stats but sheer numbers, I honestly can’t tell you what’s coming next.”

“Well, I picked up some limited vision rings,” Batrire said as she handed one to everybody but Max. “After those last two floors, I don’t want to be in the dark.”

Fowl snorted and chuckled, laughing harder when Batrire realized she had unintentionally made a pun.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

SUPER busy week but got some cool news!

For those who don't know, I have a webtoon that is in the produce of being started.

Kisai Entertainment is the company behind it and I'm working with Moonquill on this project.

Hopefully in the coming weeks I'll have some quality sketches to show as they do the character sketching before we start the first chapters :)

The goal is around December / January to have chapters going and posted on the webtoon site!

Thought I would share just a small update and tell you all how much it makes my heart feel good, knowing everyone enjoys seeing Fowl get used as a battering ram.

212 - Fighting Won't Get You Out

212 - Fighting Won't Get You Out - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG (Book 4 Stubs 8/29!) | Royal Road

“Rooted!”

Max was glad Tanila’s root had worked this time. The earth elementals were a massive pain in groups of four, even though they weren’t fast.

The constant barrage of tremor attacks and their thick bodies made the process of killing them no fun.

He had acquired seven points of strength and constitution, but after that, no more came. This gave him a base of one hundred and eighty for both stats, helping to give a small jumping point to where the max stats of these things were.

“I got it!” Fowl shouted as the second golem came up, both of them bashing against the dwarf’s shield.

Using his speed, Max danced around the third one, his new weapon creating massive cracks every time the hammer side of it hit. Once a large enough seam was created, he dashed forward after dodging the strike, plunged the massive spiked tip into the crack, and drove forward, breaking the leg in half, watching as the twelve-foot monster fell to the ground.

Batrire’s heals kept Fowl topped off, requiring much less effort after her new pants and staff gave her the bonuses she desperately needed.

“It’s free!” Batrire shouted as Max felt the golem Tanila had rooted moving again.

The fact that they were fighting in an underground cavern of some sort really made life painful. Even though they could navigate through the tunnels, being in the darkened area made Max wonder why so many appeared in a row.

Focusing his mind on the target coming toward the group. Max went to work disabling the golem so he could help Fowl with the other two.

“These things are a great experience but have horrible drops,” Fowl muttered, chipping at the broken crystal in the defeated elemental’s cracked chest. “The worst part is Cordellia is basically twiddling her thumbs.”

“Hey!” their ranger cried out. “Leave me alone! I’m enjoying pretending to be Batrire!”

Max just nodded, staring at the winding cavern. A few torches lined the walls in their direction, yet once again, they were descending into the depths of a tower floor.

“What’s on your mind?”

Max shrugged, smiling at Tanila, who he had sensed coming up behind him.

“All this underground stuff and dark side really is getting to me. Does it feel like the tower is pointing us in a certain direction?”

Sighing, Tanila’s head moved up and down as she looked out over the dark expanse they couldn’t see. Even with the rings, it was only about fifty yards before the darkness was impossible to pierce, and the torches stood out enough only to show they still had miles to go.

“These are simple earth golems. It makes me wonder why, but they aren’t horrible; they are just a pain to deal with. Other than a wall to block their advance or roots when they actually work, I’m about as useful at the moment as our archer.”
“That’s not true. You managed to knock one off the ledge a few fights back. I’m pretty certain that counts as a kill.”

She groaned and punched his arm playfully.

“You’re nervous, aren’t you?”

He nodded but gave her a smile.

“Everett sharing what happened to that group kind of bothered me… one hit… all it takes is one bad hit. You almost died from that minotaur, and the ice spell was able to get three of you at once.”

“But it didn’t, and don’t give me grief about luck or anything else.”

Fowl coughed as he moved up next to the two of them.

“You two about done bitching and moaning? I’d like to finish this floor sometime before I get gray hair in my beard.”

Max nodded and tapped the butt of his weapon against the rock ledge they were descending upon.

“Let’s get to it then.”

Twelve hours later, they found themselves at the base of the cavern they had been descending into. A stone bowl sat upon a massive rock in the middle of a fifty-yard circle.

Runes were inscribed into the stone floor, and if it wasn’t for the rings everyone was wearing, seeing would have been hard but not impossible. Sixteen torches were standing and lit, surrounding the circle of runes, while a single torch sat by the bowl.

“What the hell are we supposed to do here?” Fowl ask.

Tanila was walking with Batrire, and they were inspecting the runes, trying to decipher and understand what was said.

Max and Cordellia were moving around the outer edge of the circle where torches stood every ten yards or so, a rune at each point where the torches were.

As the four of them moved around the area, Fowl was up near the torch and bowl inspecting that area.

“Hey! Look at this!” Fowl shouted, getting everyone to turn and see that the torch next to the rock wasn’t part of the ground like the ones outside the circle. “There’s liquid in the bowl!”

For whatever reason, Fowl tipped the torch to the bowl, and the liquid inside leaped out, extinguishing the flame.

“FOWL!” Tanila shouted and Max knew something had gone wrong when not only did his sonar pick up the rumbling of the ground, but he felt magical energy moving through the runes.

Each torch tipped over, the fire landing on the line of runes near it and ignited.

Suddenly, sixteen runic lines of fire raced toward the area where Fowl was standing, still in shock at the extinguished torch in his hand.

“RUN!” Max shouted as he drew his weapon, sensing the movement from under the ground.

Everyone raced toward the edge of the circle, Cordellia being the first to arrive when she smacked face-first into an invisible barrier. The collision knocked her backward and onto her butt.

“Fowl, I’m going to kill you!” Batrire shouted as she and Tanila smacked into the same barrier that had stopped Cordellia.

Nothing showed up in Max’s sonar range regarding a barrier, which meant whatever it was was something magical.

“We can’t get out!” Tanila yelled as she and Batrire tried to make their way toward Cordellia.

The rock with the bowl on top of it began to rise from the ground, dragging parts of the rock floor with it as the runes of fire outlined the body of the golem.

Red and orange, glowing runes seemed to wrap themselves around the beast that came alive, not one mishapen like the other golems with their round bodies and oversized arms and legs. The one standing before them began to chip and break, forming a sixteen-foot-tall golem that looked like a person wearing plate armor and holding a massive stone sword.

It stood there, upright, both hands clasped on the pommel of the stone sword that ran to the ground. A few final fire runes raced up the blade. When the last rune that had been circling it was gone, the golem's eyes glowed red, and it began to move.

The six-foot-long sword lifted upward as it grasped it in both hands.

“Seth! What do we do?” Tanila asked as he felt her and the others bunching up, unable to get past the barrier holding them in.

Fowl had tossed down the extinguished torch and was swinging his mace at the golem, no noticeable damage being done at all when it connected against the stone leg.

Charging the golem before it could launch an attack, Max swung his weapon. The hammer side of the polearm hit with all the force he could muster, and it bounced off with no damage appearing.

[Rampage]

[Power Strike]

[Magical Strike]

Max’s next attack connected so fast that all three attacks were over in the blink of an eye.

He was grimacing, having witnessed that not a single one even chipped the golem at all.

Its sword came at him, swinging with a speed that was much faster than the other golems attacks, shifting its stance as it moved.

Holding his weapon up to parry, Max found himself flying through the air, slamming into the invisible barrier with his back.

[Regeneration]

Coughing up a little blood, Max blinked his eyes after falling about ten feet to the ground.

It just knocked me twenty-five yards and didn't take a single bit of damage!

It's a puzzle. Find the key!

Shaking his head, Max heard the voice and knew it had to be right. That attack would have taken down most people or monsters, yet the golem was unharmed.

"There's a puzzle! We need to figure out what it is!"

Max scanned the floor and saw that there was only one rune on the rock floor where he was standing, right near the base of the barrier. Behind him was the torch that had tipped over, pointing away from the golem.

"Is there a rune near you?! I think it's a clue!"

Max's brain was running full tilt as he slogged through the pain of his chest bones reconnected, and blood stopped coming from his mouth.

Running in the opposite direction of the other three, he saw where each of the fallen torches lay, a rune was carved in the ground.

"There is one at each torch!" Tanila shouted. "What do we do?"

Channeling fire at the rune, Max sent a bolt quickly, but nothing happened when it connected.

"Is there an order? I can tell each rune is different!"

Moving closer to the back of the golem that was sending attack after attack at Fowl, Max cast Fire Nova and watched as the flames spread out, hoping one of the runes would ignite.

None of the ones he watched were on fire, but when he turned to see how Tanila was doing, Max noticed that the torch Fowl had discarded was now lit.

"That's the key!" Tanila yelled.

Racing toward the discarded torch, flickering on the ground, Max dove to the side when his sonar informed him of an incoming sword strike.

His shield appeared, and even with a slight deflection, the force sent him flying a few yards.

Pain in his shield arm let him know it was most likely fractured.

Holding a hand out, Max focused his wind magic and sent a gust of air, blasting the torch away from where the golem was and closer to Tanila and the others.

As the torch moved, the golem followed, its sword coming into contact again with Fowl, who grunted from the pain of each strike.

“This one’s first!” Cordellia shouted as she pointed to a rune near her. “It went out first!”

Trying to remember the order in which that had all happened, Max didn’t like the choices he had.

“Spread out!” he yelled as he stood up, his arm finally fixed and no longer hurting.

“Do we touch it to the rune?!”

“I guess!” Tanila shouted as she held up her hand like he had. “You ready?”

Nodding, Max prepared to see what Tanila was about to do.

Her gust of air was much better focused, and the torch raced toward him, coming to rest only a few yards away. As it tumbled along the ground, the golem followed, its weapon never stopping the barrage of attacks at Fowl when he was close.

Right before the golem got to him, Max sent a gust of air out, sending the torch almost to Cordellia, who ran a few yards and grabbed it. Racing toward the rune she had been at, she held it to the floor, and the torch behind her suddenly stood up, igniting itself.

A groan came from the golem as it moved toward the elf.

“Throw it away!”

She tossed it before the golem got to her, and as it flew through the air, the stone guardian turned, playing the most dangerous game of keep-away Max had ever known.

Batrire snagged it from where it landed, touching the rune she was standing near. The one by Cordellia went out, the torch on the other side falling down.

Letting out a shriek, their healer tossed the torch toward the center and scattered as the golem got within four yards of her.

“It’s a puzzle! One wrong move, and it starts all over!” Tanila yelled. “Now what?”

“Keep the torch in the middle! Let’s try to find out what one comes next! Fowl are you ok?”

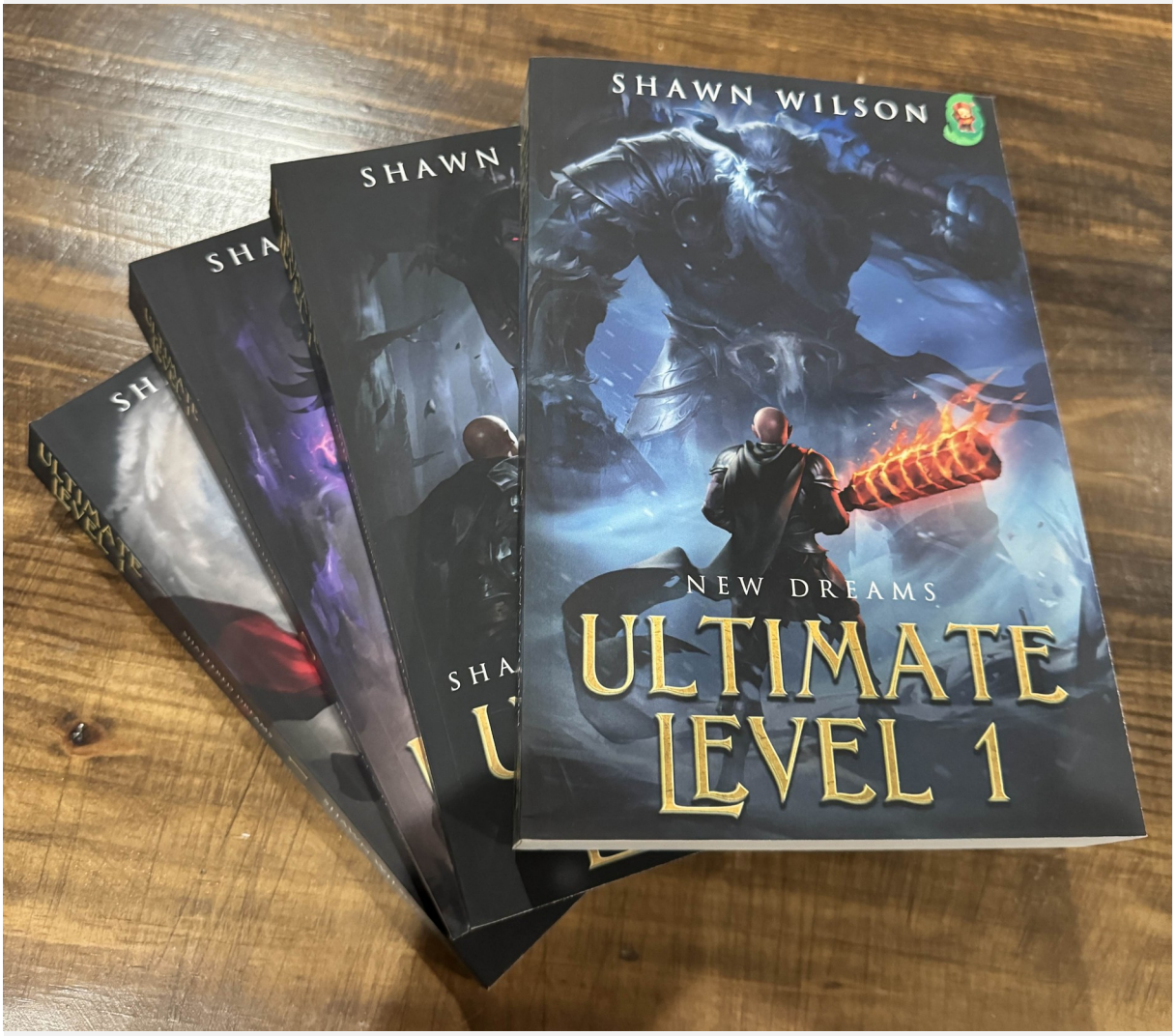
The only sound the dwarf made was a grunt as the guardian of the torch stood a few feet from the flaming stick on the ground.

Cursing, Max ran around the room, wishing he could help Fowl but knowing there wasn’t anything he could do right now but try to solve this puzzle.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

HUGE News!

Stay tuned for a contest of Max proportions (ok... maybe bigger)



Going to have a contest for a set of 4 books (1-4 and #4 isn't out till Sept 1st!) signed and shipped to one lucky person!

Getting some stuff prepped and will have hopefully where to sign up for the contest tomorrow! Keep watching and thanks to everyone who made this possible!

213 - Puzzles and More [213 - Puzzles and More - Ultimate Level 1 LitRPG (Book 4 Stubs 8/29!) | Royal Road]

“I remember the last one,” Tanila said, breathing hard from running around the circle and looking at the runes.

“So we know the first, maybe the second, and then the last. That’s like, what? Ten thousand or more combinations?”

Tanila frowned and glanced at Batrire.

“I’m able to keep healing for now thanks to these new items.”

Fowl had to stay close to the golem. Otherwise, if he moved out of the attack range, the guardian would stomp on the torch, extinguish the fire, and attack the closest target.

Only when the torch was lit, and someone was within attack range did the golem not move.

“You’re certain about this? Do you think you can find out enough of the combination in time?”

“Any is better than none, and as long as we start to figure them out, we can eventually get them all. The problem is we need to move. She only has so much mana.”

Tanila nodded and shrugged.

“Fine, Cordellia. Keep a log. I’ll try to help, too, but if I can, I’ll use my walls to slow it down.”

Nodding, Max got into position.

“Everyone take a step away from the barrier. Give me just a little more room.”

After each of them had moved a yard away from the invisible wall, Max took a deep breath and focused.

[Haste]

In a blink, he was on the torch, gone before the sword had even made a move toward him.

Racing around the room, the torch never went out, even with all the air whipping at it.

Like a cyclone, he hit the first rune, watching it ignite. Then, the second one Cordellia had pointed out ignited, and he started the pattern of testing.

The third didn’t work and before the torches could hit the ground, he had relit the first two again.

Not taking his eyes off of what he was doing, his sonar gave him the show of his life.

The guardian was trying to move and follow him, unable to keep up with the speed, standing there, not attacking or moving.

Five tries later, the third rune was found, and each circuit took less than a second.

“Goblin!”

Max shouted the runes because he was moving so fast. He wasn’t sure if Cordellia could keep up with the changes that took place in less than a second. They had named them, and she jotted them down as he shouted.

“Water!”

“Snake!”

“Dragon!”

Five were solved within fifteen seconds, and with only half of his ability remaining, Max tried to pick up the pace.

“Fish! Tree! Rat! Dwarf!”

Luck had been on his side, with the seventh, eighth, and ninth ones all hitting in a row.

“Sun!”

Four seconds remained as every one he tried after the last failed, requiring the other only one remaining to be the eleventh one.

“X!”

“Moon!”

With three to go, his Haste ability ended, and his speed returned to normal.

Touching the next one, Max figured the pattern might end a certain way and was right, at least for once.

“Grapes!”

There were three runes left, and the rock was the last one. The bucket and fire rune were the only remaining ones.

Fowl moved to engage as the golem came toward Max, moving faster than before.

Without waiting, he tossed the torch into the middle near their dwarf and ducked as the sword whistled from the attack coming toward his head.

“Bucket or fire! Which one?!”

No one wanted to guess, knowing that if they were wrong, all the runes would have to be lit again.

“Fire!” Fowl shouted before taking a hit from the guardian’s sword and getting knocked down to his knees.

“It’s hitting harder!” Batrire yelled as she healed.

The sword was moving faster, and Max saw that as this ended, it was going to get worse.

“Tanila! Get to the bucket! Cordellia to the fire!”

They were almost in a triangle, each of the runes equally apart.

Moving sideways, Max raced so that the angle was right and, as the weapon started to fall, blew the torch toward Cordellia to buy her as much time as possible.

His aim was better, and she got the torch. Touching it down to the rune, it ignited. Leaping to the side, she sidearm tossed the torch to the middle. Cordellia avoided a crushing blow from the boss's sword by just a few feet. It was a lot faster now, and it had covered the twenty yards in just a moment.

“Push it toward me, and then I’ll push toward you!”

Tanila lined herself up and sent a gust of wind, knocking the torch two-thirds away from her. Max had his shield out and his skills ready as he sent the torch back to her as the golem came toward him and the light it had to protect.

His aim was off, and as Tanila moved to get it, she cast air walls, and he cast a stone wall trying to slow the guardian down.

It easily crashed through both, and Tanila had to retreat, leaving the torch where it was.

“Reset!”

Batrire was at a third of her mana, the damage being done to Fowl requiring more heals now to keep him standing.

It took both of them pushing the torch twice to get it in the same spot as before, and this time, Max focused more, timing the attack again, and sent the torch right to Tanila.

She grabbed it, touching the rune, and tossed it toward where he would need it.

The boss glowed red and Fowl glowed green, both of them activating skills.

No time was left to waste and Max raced forward, using all of his skills for defense.

[Evasion]

[Bulward]

[Armored Warrior]

He grabbed the torch and felt a blow from the boss that he couldn’t dodge hit his shield, the power behind it almost knocking him down through those abilities.

Another attack came faster than the previous one, and a cracking sound filled his ears.

Unsure if it was his arm or the shield, as the pain hurt either way, Max lunged for the rune, touching the torch to it and watching as it lit up.

His sonar told him an attack was coming, and his arm was raised on its own, preparing to block it.

Four inches away, the blade stopped, and runes began to appear on the guardian's sword and body.

Cracking and popping sounds came as lines appeared all over the golem. Rolling to the side and out of the way, Max stood up and found that the barrier was gone.

Chunks of stone fell to the floor, and when the cloud of dust settled, a single glowing orb, brown in color, rested in a massive crack in what used to be the guardian's chest.

“We won,” Fowl muttered. “We actually won!”

[Regeneration]

The feeling in his arm answered the question that it was his bone that had broken. His shield had withstood the blow.

“What in the world was that?” Fowl asked as he moved near the glowing orb but didn’t touch it.

“That is an earth core,” their mage replied. “You can touch that, but next time you touch something without getting permission, I’m going to cut your manhood off, do you understand?!”

With the torchlight back, Max was pretty sure Fowl had turned red and that it wasn’t just the glow around them.

A portal appeared back at the center of the circle, and everyone took a deep breath and let it out.

“So… I’m not sure what I prefer: bosses who just need to be beat up or puzles like that,” Cordellia said. “I can’t imagine beating that without you all.”

“Maybe there was a way to skip it,” Batrire replied, “but we’ll never know since Fowl likes touching things he’s not supposed to.”

A few chuckles came, and their dwarven warrior groaned.

“Someone else grab that orb then. I don’t want to get in trouble and be blamed in case something else pops out.”

Tanila moved forward and pulled it free, laughing when nothing happened.

“Let’s get out of here,” Batrire said. “I’m tired of having to work so hard.”

“Puzzles… already?” Tom asked as he and Everett listened to the report of what they had just faced. “That’s typically something not till the twentieth floor, maybe the twenty-sixth. However, what you described is not completely uncommon. There are lots of puzzles that require you to think your way out instead of fighting.”

“And an earth core… you all are going to be in for a fun time, I’m afraid, as you continue going through the tower.”

Max nodded at Everett, who had said fun instead of trouble. He knew exactly what was happening, and that was what scared him.

“You all can take that one,” Max said. “Earth isn’t really what we need right now.”

“*Need right now*,” scoffed Tom in a mocking tone. “Oh, to be their level and choose to pass up something like that. Back in our day, we gladly used whatever we could come across.”

Everett chuckled and nodded.

“It’s okay. The day they show up with a fireforge bar and turn it down, remind me to retire.”

Tom groaned at that comment.

“What’s a fireforge bar?” Max asked.

“Something rare and powerful,” Fowl chimed in. “Dwarves will basically do anything you want for one of those. The weapons or armor that can be made from them is legendary.”

Max pulled out his book and made a note.

“Ok, so something to keep our eyes out for.”

“Blast me, I need a drink,” Tom muttered and stood up. “You five need anything else or are we done?”

Looking at the items on the stone counter they had deposited from all the golems, Max shook his head.

“Then I’m headed to the mess hall, and tomorrow, I expect the five of you outside in the morning for some training. I guess the perk of you having to wait on a cooldown is you can’t get away from me that easily.”

Max glanced up from the book he was reading while reclining on the padded chair in their room. Tanila, who was just a few feet away, was on the other, reading a book, her finger moving along the paper.

“Is this what we’ll be like when we’re older? Sitting in a room, reading together?”

She looked up at him and smiled, but Max immediately saw that it wasn’t a real one.

“Why are you smiling like that? Prefer not to grow old with me?”

Closing her book, she sat a little bit more upright in her chair and sighed.

“You realize I’m going to live a lot longer than you are. So when you talk about being old in sixty years, I’ll barely be a quarter through my life.”

Max realized he hadn’t considered that and saw how she bit her lip for a moment.

“Does that bother you? Knowing I won’t live as long as you?”

She shook her head and got up, moving to where he was. She took the book he had, stored it in her inventory, and sat down on his lap.

“It doesn’t. I just don’t want you to get upset when you’re wrinkly and bald… oh, wait, you’re already bald.”

Both of them laughed as she ran her fingers across his head.

“I could grow it out if you want. I’m pretty certain no one is looking for Max Hoste anymore.”

Smiling, she leaned forward and kissed the top of his bald head.

“No, I prefer it now. For a while, I wasn’t certain but your face isn’t so bad to look at and luckily, your skull isn’t deformed. It’s almost perfect in shape.

Faking a mock gasp, Max ran his hand through her unbraided hair and then began to slowly massage her back.

“Are we okay? Something has been bothering you, and even if you don’t want to tell me, I want you to know that I’m here no matter what.”

She nodded, chewing on her lip.

He could feel her heart beating faster slightly, and his sonar told him how different veins were throbbing from the anxiety she felt. Max always resisted telling her that he could read her so well, especially when they were alone, and nothing was there to distract him.

“You really don’t know much about elven royalty, do you?”

“Besides the fact that one of them wants to kill me, the other likes to kiss me, and I’m currently praying the King and Queen don’t know I exist? Nope, I don’t got a clue.”

She nodded as she rubbed the wrist he knew the bracelet was on that hid her identity.

“You don’t have to tell me. Just know, nothing you say will ever make me not love you.”

Groaning, she rolled her eyes and then pulled him close, kissing his lips.

“You’re a bastard, and I hope you know that,” she said after they pulled apart. “Using all those brains to get me to share what I don’t want to.”

“What can I say?” Max replied. “I’m not like Fowl. I actually put points into intelligence.”

Both of them chuckled, and she leaned against him, trying to decide how much to tell him.

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After a few minutes, Tanila sat up and poked Max in the chest.

“Fine, listen, but don’t talk unless I ask you to. I need to tell you something because I won’t be able to hide it at some point anymore.”

Max nodded and pretended to lock his lips.

Groaning, she motioned over her hidden bracelet and slipped it off after it appeared.

Immediately, her hair and eyes turned gold. Light began to radiate from her around the room.

“It takes a lot of power to keep this hidden,” Tanila said as she watched Max smile at her softly. “The bracelet does more than just hide my appearance. It does a lot more than that. Part of it keeps me from overwhelming any elf I come across. Being in my presence or any of the other in my father's bloodline, will find themselves struggling to resist commands or instructions. At first, it might be possible if they are strong enough, but with enough time, it is easy to break down someone's will.”

Spinning the bracelet around her finger, she watched Max for a reaction and didn’t see one that scared her.

“Cordellia would never argue with me and would submit to anything I said if I adventured like this. Had I revealed my true self to those elves we encountered on that forest floor, they would not have liked the attitude the one had taken with me. You remember the assassin?”

Max nodded.

“I didn’t have to use my red skill on him. This alone is all I needed. There are ways to force things from elves when I am like this. The problem is what is left sometimes after I do so.”

She stared off above the back of the chair for a moment, considering her next words.

“I imagine it to be similar and yet different from when your skill takes you over. Can you fight it, or does it get to do whatever it wants?”

After not talking, she groaned and tapped his forehead.

“You can speak.”

Winking, he smirked for a second.

“Yes and no. It was like I watched a few times, unable to do anything but watch. Now… well, that’s a story I can share after you finish with yours.”

Her golden eyebrow raised questionably, but Tanila nodded.

“When I’m like this, my stats are also much higher. Unlike your kind… or even the dwarves… I get a bonus to everything.”

She poked Max in the chest as he sat there, gently squeezing her leg when she stopped talking again.

“Sorry… it’s a lot. All of my stats are doubled.”

Coughing a few times, Max’s eyes went wide as his mouth opened slightly.

“Double…” he whispered.

“So my real power is like this, but it comes with a cost.”

Slipping the bracelet back on, Tanila’s hair shifted back to red, and her eyes became green again.

“The longer I’m in that form, the harder it is for me to resist it. My mother…… she cannot imagine hiding her true self. For the sake of the kingdom, my father hid his for so long; thus, he can change only when needed, but he found the problem with glowing like that was how the other leaders reacted. No one likes looking at what many have called an angel… or a devil, depending on who you ask.

“My mother never cared and didn’t want to hide who she is. That is why some of my siblings are a bit more… hateful of the other races. She feels we have to hide for their sake instead of revealing who Thuyja meant for us to be.”

Grabbing Max’s hand, she intertwined her fingers with his.

“I’m afraid what will come one day when my parents learn about you. That is another reason why I keep this hidden. When you finally do meet them, you must be strong enough to stand before them and not bow to them.”

Max nodded and kissed her fingers.

“Are you going to talk or ask questions?” she asked, frowning at him.

“You said not to, so I kept quiet.”

She groaned and kissed his fingers back.

“Fine, now tell me what it was you hadn’t told me yet.”

Groaning, Max took a deep breath and filled her in on how his skill had changed.

Everyone groaned as they ate lunch, tired and worn out more than a dungeon run after the first four hours spent with Tom. He once again found new ways to improve their training.

Tanila especially hated how the man had used their knowledge of walls to propel people upward, making her bounce a special metal ball tied down with chains upward after summing a wall beneath it and then hitting it with a magic spell.

It made sense, but the mana drain and concentration required were intense.

Batrire had run out of mana multiple times as Max and Fowl were assaulted by half a dozen attackers each, working on blocking and parrying while their healer got a workout trying to juggle both of their lives.

All the bruises were gone from Cordellia’s face now. Batrire had been allowed to heal her after Tom had people throwing stuff at her while she had to make a certain number of shots within those same small targets. She quickly learned that there was a ringer with the throwing skill that Tom had paid off to hit her every so often.

“I won’t lie,” Fowl said, putting his empty cup down. “Days like today make me long for a tower floor where I only get beat by two or three things.”

Batrire chuckled and nodded.

“I’m just glad we can get back into the tower and away from this torture,” Cordellia muttered. “Tom better not put that same guy against me again, or so help me, I’ll shoot both of them.”

Max finished the last bite of his food and stood up.

“I need to go downstairs and do some work. Are we good for breakfast at the start of the day?”

Everyone nodded and waved, no longer worried about Max and how he always had something to do.”

The final touches of Fowl’s new hammer were almost done, and Tanila arrived near the tail end of it.

It was three feet long, but the weight would be minimal when swung. It was perfectly balanced. One side had a massive hook spike, while the other had a slightly wider hammer section. It would help their warrior out when he fought multiple different creatures. One for bashing and the other for piercing.

Dwarven runes had been crafted on both the blue metal of the head and along the bone shaft.

Max had confused Everett with his choices from the possible materials, but both skills had directed him in the selection that resulted in the weapon he was about to complete.

“Is that it?” Tanila asked quietly.

Max nodded, and Everett, who had been in the room for the last hour, watched on with amazement.

The item in his hand had cost everything Max had built up payment-wise, but Fowl needed it in so many ways. It was worth the twenty-plus items he would have to craft before he could make a request like this again.

“A vampire heart, locked in a core,” Max replied as he held the red ball that pulsed with a heartbeat.

“How?”

Everett shook his head.

“It’s been in the material list for years. No one ever wanted to use it or felt it could be used. Apparently, Seth believes he can do something no one else can.”

Max ignored the two and studied the lines and runes again.

You’re certain this will work?

I cannot see any other way to make this more successful than killing someone with a godly-tier weapon crafting ability and taking their skill.

Grumbling to himself, Max shook his head and then closed his eyes for a moment.

Taking a deep breath, he let it out and then began the work.

Casting dark magic, Max made sure it was focused at the point of the core touching the hammerhead. Each of the runes began to glow as the core came in contact with them. Shifting between black and red, they pulsed from the power that was joining with the metal. Hidden at the center of the metal hammer was a tooth from an actual vampire. The heart inside the core beat faster, sensing the presence of its own almost and yearning to join with it.

Everyone held their breath as Max spun the hammer in his special vice, allowing him access to every inch of metal without needing to do anything but turn it.

Careful!

The skill warned him as a buildup of magic formed in one rune. Max almost moved the core too fast from the spot, resulting in feedback that would have destroyed this enchantment. Sweat dripped from his forehead, not because of heat but because of what this had taken.

Slowly, steadily, retrace that one. Good… now track the line and connect it to the last part. Be ready when I say to infuse more magic.

Max struggled to believe this was the same skill that had fought him tooth and nail to lose control and give in to the bloodlust. It had evolved and changed not just in its power or desire but was somehow different. There was an intelligence behind it. A life that had realized only one path right now existed to power, and it would only come from Max’s heart.

Now! Flood it with magic!

The orb was on the last rune, one he didn’t recognize but felt power coming from. Like so many things he hadn’t learned yet about crafting, the rune matched something inside him—a power and hunger, a thirst for more.

The red and black glow of magic swirled like a vortex, funneling down a never-ending tube of thirst.

Be ready to stop… it is almost done… now!

Cutting the flow of mana and magic, the orb went dark, turning into ash as the power of his spell casting ended.

A hum came from the weapon, and Max saw the notification.

[25 Experience]

[* Legendary Hammer Created]

Max was surprised by both the experience he acquired and by the message he saw.

What is that?

Something more powerful than anything you will find for a long time… I must rest, and you must feed me more. My time here is done for a while.

With that, the voice was gone, and Max wished he could just call it Bob, but he knew it would never accept that name.

“What is that?” Everett asked, his voice unable to hide the awe he felt.

[*Inspect Hammer*]

*****

* Legendary Vamperic Hammer

+ 100 Strength, Constitution

+ 50 Dexterity

Vampiric Touch

* May Evolve

*****

Max would have dropped the hammer had it not still been in the vice. His eyes couldn’t believe what he had made or what he held in his hands.

“Seth?”

Smacking, Max shook his head and then looked at Everett.

“I need you to do me a favor. Go get Fowl.”

“But didn’t you say you didn’t want him to know you made this for him?”
Max nodded, took the hammer, and slowly spun it around in his hand.

“Do you trust me?”

Everett’s head moved back quickly, and the man blinked a few times but slowly nodded.

“I just let you use all of that stuff. How can you ask that question?”

He saw the look on their Faction leader's face, frustration, hurt, and surprise. The tone at which Everett had just spoken conveyed all that as well.

“I’m going to show you this when he is here. You’ll understand once that moment takes place. I won’t even share it with Tanila until Fowl has gotten a chance to see it for himself. To do so would… it wouldn’t be right.”

Frowning, Everett shook his head.

“Sometimes I think we forget who is in charge, but then I know when I get back with that dwarf, I’ll find out you were right and have to complain to Tom about it.”

“I wouldn’t,” Max replied quietly. “You’ll know why in just a few minutes.”

Frowning, Everett grunted and then turned, leaving Tanila and Max alone.

“You going to tell me?”

Shaking his head, Max sighed. “I mean what I say. Trust me.”

Fowl’s hands gave out, and the hammer fell to the floor, clanging against the stone.

Tears began to roll down his cheeks as the dwarf looked at Max, who had just handed him the weapon.

“I… You…”

Bending down, Max picked up the hammer and held it out to his friend.

“You dropped something. I’m pretty sure you shouldn’t just leave it lying around. There’s even a loop on the bottom if you need to slip your hand through so that doesn’t happen again.”

Shaking his head and blinking through the tears, Fowl’s hands were shaking as Max pressed the grip into his friend’s hand and closed it around.

“Now, don’t drop it again, or I might give it to Tanila and let her join me on the front line.”

Coughing and laughing, Fowl nodded and held the hammer to his face, inspecting the runes and the dwarven language Max had inscribed.

“You wrote this like a dwarf would,” Fowl muttered, tears flowing as he read what had been written.

*****

For the only warrior I know who is strong enough to carry a family through sheer will and humor.

May your weapon always strike true and never break Fowl Hammerfall.

H.E.T.

*****

“What does the HET stand for?” Fowl asked as he used his left hand to wipe away more of the liquid escaping from his eyes.

“Oh, that’s easy, it's Holy Elf Tits,” Max said with a wink.

Roaring with laughter, Fowl gave the weapon a small swing before storing it and bull-rushing Max, picking him up and bear-hugging him.

“No matter what Batrire says, whatever child we have first is named after you!”

Bending down, Max hugged him back and quietly whispered into the dwarf’s ear.

“Only share the stats.”

Tanila and Everett were waiting patiently, though the pained look of wanting to smile and laugh with both men was there. Each was desperate to know what the weapon provided.

When Everett heard the stats, the older man almost fell to the ground, thankful for the table that caught him.

Max produced a water skin for the Faction leader as he helped him stand up. The man waved it off and pulled a metal flask from his inventory. He took a hit and offered it to everyone else. Only Fowl took a drink before handing it back while smacking his tongue to the roof of his mouth.

“Those stats… their…”

“It needs to be kept secret,” Max stated. “I don’t want a riot to be caused, and this is one I’m not certain I’ll be able to replicate at any time. Everything for that item was perfect. Perhaps another will come along, and I can make it for whoever you deem fit.”

Clearing his throat a few more times, Everett took a second sip of his drink and nodded, then put the cap on and stored it.

“How about we all just agree it gives fifty to the first three stats? Still broken but not… ungodly.”

Everyone nodded, and Max smiled as he held Tanila’s hand, watching Fowl almost skip out of the room.

With the door closed, Everett leaned against the table and shook his head.

“Why in the gods would someone be able to make something like that… a seed of fear began to grow in the Faction leader's mind.

“If all of them are equipped like that, who could stop them?”

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“They’re biting my ankles!” Fowl shouted as his hammer bashed in three more goblins in a single swing.

As the three died, four more goblins half their size burst from their chests, sharp teeth and claws trying to tear into the plate-covered dwarf that had foolishly stumbled upon them.

Max groaned as his poleaxe cut through the horde of goblins. They weren't strong but their numbers were pissing him off.

"Fire Nova in five!"

Max grunted and continued swinging his weapon, taking out as many of the stupid green creatures with blindfolds as he could.

Flames rolled out from Tanila, and the group that was still alive died, more goblins springing out as it had before, and the second wave of fire destroyed those, leading another group of even smaller ones to burst forth. As the third wave went from her body, all the goblins finally were burnt to a crisp.

"What in the gods was that!" Fowl shouted as he spun around, making sure no goblin was trying to wiggle their pointy fingers in his nose, ear, or mouth.

"Not what I had expected," Max replied. "How many goblins was that total?"

Cordellia came up and began picking up the green gems that littered the burnt ground.

"Well, there were seven to start and if my math is right… a lot."

"Over three hundred," Tanila said. "They seemed to replicate four times after you killed the first and always twice as many but half as tall."

"Who cares?" Fowl replied. "None of you had fingers where they don't go!"

The dungeon was starting to be fun in ways Max didn't want to discuss. The brown dirt with almost no vegetation that led to a massive goblin city didn't seem like that big of a deal. He wasn't sure why the goblins had on blindfolds, but it appeared they had some sort of sonar or something else like his.

A dozen or so notifications had popped up about the skill being lower and powered being stored, but after that, it stopped, unsure if no more could be taken or if that was just his skill turning off the messages.

"I've got a plan," Max informed everyone as he smirked. "You might like it, and you might not, but I'm pretty sure we can do this a lot easier.

"I'm tired of bending over," Fowl said, giving Max a wink. "How many of these gems are there?"

Everyone was just grabbing and breaking the green gems that were like a sea of green.

"Four or five thousand? Sorry, I didn't keep track."

He had run along, collecting groups, fireballing them, causing a build-up of goblins that stretched for hundreds of meters.

The sound of their voices had been almost deafening, but still, he just kept killing them all, running back and forth, easily staying out of their reach.

“Guess I’m back to sitting in a chair,” Batrire said as she crushed another gem between her fingers. “Wish there was an easier way though to collect this many.”

“Are you all okay with me grabbing the other group? I think there is maybe one more large pack I can get, and then we can access the portal in the city.”

Getting a shooing motion from Tanila, Max laughed and took off running.

“That floor was well worth it,” Fowl said as he pinched another green gem. “The gems seem to be worth far less, but there were thousands of them. I’m level fifty-nine now, and we hit level fourteen for the tower. After that rocky start, we’re ahead of where we hoped to be.”

Nodding, Max watched as everyone seemed in good spirits. Easy experience always made for a good day.

“Would we like to try the next floor? We could spend the night there if we want.”

Their dwarven warrior turned and looked at Max like he had just offered to punch them in the face.“There isn’t a bathroom in the tower. Why would we want to spend the night?”

“Because, at some point, we’ll *have* to,” Batrire replied as she frowned at Fowl. “Better to get used to it when it's easier than later when the floors are harder.”

Tanila and Cordellia both nodded, overruling the outhouse-loving dwarf.”

They had almost gone back out of the tower when they came through the portal and found a three-hundred-meter-wide field with a massive hole in the middle of the rocky soil.

Fowl had wanted to turn back, accepting the days they would have to wait to attempt a floor again, but the four ignored him and had hammered in spikes and let Max go down the rope first.

As if life could never be dull, at the bottom of the cavern was a sunken area that ran up and out about seventy-five yards in each direction. The incline looked like a person had punched a fist in a ball of dough, leaving a sunken pit with a high edge.

When Fowl let go of the rope and touched the ground after everyone else, the rocky roof above them closed in, turning the place into absolute darkness.

It was at that moment Fowl screamed, and things went sideways.

Snakes of different sizes and shapes began descending down the incline at the five of them. As the place they were at became dark, everyone put their rings on, giving them some vision.

“Get on my wall!” Max called out as he summoned a stone wall between him and Fowl. “Tanila swap off as needed. Tell me when to recast!”

He grabbed Batrire and tossed her upward to the ledge that was about eight feet high on his wall, ignoring her cry and shock.

The other two moved on their own, jumping and pulling themselves up.

“I blame you!” Fowl yelled as his hammer crushed the head of a massive two-foot-wide snake.

“Stop complaining and focus!” Batrire shouted back.

Long snakes, two-headed snakes, snakes that spit acid, and more came at them from all directions, turning the sunken area into a pit of death and destruction.

“Fire Nova in four!”

Max cast his Frost Nova, using the added range of his new intelligence to help slow the attack from all around. He and Fowl fought the incoming creatures with only a few feet between them and the wall of earth he had summoned.

His pole axe sliced through the snakes with ease, and occasionally, one spit acid at him, the pain of it burning, but he never did so much damage that his regeneration couldn’t keep up with it.

Fowl’s new hammer appeared to be up to the task as ever swing devastated whatever the dwarf hit and kept his life topped up as well.

Tanila’s Fire Nova swept across the ground, consuming the bodies of all the snakes who were unfortunate enough to experience it.

Max alternated his spell with hers and also cast a fireball, using the advantage of his constant supply of mana from everything he killed.

Minutes turned into ten and then thirty, and as sixty minutes of nonstop fighting came about, Tanila was almost out of mana.

“I need to save for the walls!” she cried out.

“I got it. Try to rest!”

“Why won’t these things end?!” Fowl yelled. “Is this a time limit? Is there a certain number? Could it be another puzzle?”

Max had considered all those questions, but nothing had given him the chance to really know.

“Tanila! If I summon an air wall, can you three get on that, and you cast another and stay a little higher? I can try to explore.”

“I can just say when!”

Casting the air wall, Max watched as they helped Batrire climb on it, and then the other two got up. Now, about twelve feet in the air, they were safer than before.

“Don’t die, Fowl!” Max shouted as he raced up one of the inclines, slicing at the snakes and casting another Fire Nova to help clear the way.

Laughter came from his dwarf friend, fully enjoying every second of his awesomeness.

Climbing up the steep incline wasn't bad as his legs and strength easily made it upward. As he got to the top side, his sonar revealed a bunch of cages along the wall, their bars lifted high and allowing snakes into the room.

Cursing under his breath for Fowl having been right and for them fighting this long, Max used his halberd to slice the thick rope holding a gate open. The cage door snapped shut with a clang, and a snake slammed into it, not budging the gate.

Groaning that this had been so easy, Max began his journey around the entire cave area, making his way to each cage along the wall, slaughtering everything that got in his way.

"Need an air wall!"

Tanila's shout came, and Max gave a quick slice with his weapon, sheering the snake's face off. Racing toward the edge he cast his airwall and put an ice one under it.

"It's ready!"

He watched the three jump to his and then returned back to the job at hand, already noticing the number of snakes rapidly dwindling.

As the last gate clanged shut and the hissing of pissed-off and angry serpents echoed through the room, openings above the cages appeared in the wall, and torches appeared.

Shrieks came from the snakes as they fought to escape wherever they had come from, and Max frowned, unsure what would happen next.

"I guess I was right," Fowl declared. "There was something we needed to do."

Bobbing his head, Max helped Batrire down and caught the other two as they dropped. He got a kiss from Tanila before setting her down.

Grinding noises came from one of the sides, and with the light starting to flood the area they were in, a passage opened up in the wall between two cages.

"I guess that's the way to go?"

Batrire gave Fowl a playful kick in the rear for asking that question.

"Warrior's first, my love."

Grunt, he moved toward the incline, moving up it much easier than before with the added strength and dexterity his weapon now provided.

As they got to the top as a group, not a snake was seen at the edge of the bars.

"Where did they go?" Cordellia asked. "I can hear them, but what happened?"

“The torches lit, and they scattered like crazy,” Max replied. “It was the weirdest thing, honestly. One moment, they were bashing against the bars, and the next, they turned tail and slithered away.”

Fowl started laughing, and Tanila groaned.

“Turned tail…”

Fowl glanced down the tunnel and saw that torches lined the four-foot-wide section of stone that appeared to have been cut out with one item. Not a single chip or crease could be found in the stone.

“I’ll go first,” he sighed and moved ahead, leaving Max at the back and the others in the middle of both of them.

Walking for a while brought them to a circled room with a massive emblem on the floor and the portal right in the middle. Torches lined all around, and a small chest sat near the portal like the bat one had.

“Ewww…” Cordellia said as she pointed at the relief on the floor. A massive ball of snakes reached out in every direction, and the heads pointed away from the ball in the middle.

“Not what I want hanging on the wall of my bedroom,” Max said.

“Especially if you ever hoped for me to step foot in there again,” Tanila added.

Fowl was already at the chest and dropping pouch from it.

“Only five… I guess we were slacking.”

Laughing, each person picked up a pouch and stored it.

“I’m ready for some sun and a dungeon that doesn’t have darkness.”

Max laughed and nodded at Batrire’s imitation of Fowl.

“Wait… was that supposed to be me?” their warrior asked.

“Oh… sorry I didn’t whine enough,” their healer replied.

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Tom watched them as they sat there in the dining hall, staring at them in disbelief.

“Two… two floors in a day and home for dinner… you all need to slow it down some or people are going to notice.”

Max nodded and kept chewing. The beef today had been slow-cooked and was falling apart when it was picked up. Everything was so tender that a knife wasn’t needed to cut it. Fresh vegetables, warm bread with just a hint of sweetness, and a thick red sauce with brown sugar in it made this a perfect meal to sit down for.

“I’m here to tell you that Everett won’t be hanging around you as much. Some are wondering if we’re giving you five preferential treatment, which is causing your success in the tower.”

“But that’s not the case,” Fowl replied, forgetting his manners as he spoke with a mouth full of meat. “We’ve done this on our own.”

Their trainer cocked his head and raised an eyebrow at Fowl, and made a hammering motion.

“All on your own?”

“Well, until yesterday… okay, fine, we had a little help but nothing more than you would give others, right?”

Shaking his head, Tom frowned at their dwarven warrior.

“Even I need to back off a little bit. At least in public.”

With those words, he stood up and gave them a quick wave.

“Don’t forget to turn in whatever drops you have tomorrow,” Tom said as he walked toward another table of Faction members.

“He’s right,” Tanila said quietly, her eyes focused on the cup in her hands. “We can’t imagine what kind of pushback they have been getting for how the last month has gone. It will only get worse the more we progress until there is a point where no one can deny our ability, and then things shift even more.”

“But that’s not a bad thing,” Cordellia replied, leaning over the table so she would whisper. “Dexic and her group were similar in some ways, from what I hear. Mind you, they were not as fast, but they were still progressing faster than most. You all do realize she has spent years getting to where she is now.”

“Thirty more tower floors in two years… that seems like a short time,” Fowl joked.

“And how many months ago were we in Rumstant?” Tanila asked. “And before that? Time is passing quicker than you realize, especially if you’re a bald-headed human.”

Everyone chuckled, including Max, acknowledging that time was definitely different for him.

Max had chuckled when he found the sheet to sign up for training, with Tom nailed to his door in the hallways in the morning. He wasn’t sure if the hammer he made for Fowl was the deciding factor in all these changes, but whatever had caused it, there was a reason, and he trusted the man in charge.

Breakfast went fast and everyone stored a few extra servings in their inventory, knowing that it would be fine and fresh when it came time to eat.

Cordellia was bouncing with excitement inside the carriage, and even Fowl didn’t seem to mind the leg shaking she was doing the entire time.

Standing outside of the tower floor, Fowl went first as always, choosing the fifteenth floor and touching the swirling portal.

“That’s a sight to see,” Fowl muttered as he stood on the black, broken ground.

Everyone saw the rolling fields of stone statues, each one in different shapes and sizes. Off far in the distance was a broken colosseum-like structure with massive pillars and arches. One-third of the building appeared to be missing on the right side near the top of it.

“What is this place?” Cordellia asked as they stood shoulder to shoulder, looking at the random hodgepodge of statues.

“Probably a trap,” Max said as his eyes scanned the field. “Something out there must be ready to attack.”

“Or worse yet, maybe they all attack,” Fowl replied.

The clang of a wooden staff against a plate helm rang out, and Batrire gave their warrior a scowl.

“Stop talking like that,” she groaned.

“Well, go slow, and let's see what we find,” Max said as he held back the temptation to laugh.

Covering the seventy yards to the first random statue, Max and the others saw that it was one of four goblins, similar to the ones they had faced a few dungeons ago. They looked lifelike and had weapons and armor on, crafted in a battle pose.

Fowl moved up to one and slammed his hammer into it, shattering off a chunk and causing it to fall apart.

Noise and dust from his action earned him a few grumbles from their healer.

About ten yards behind their main warrior, Max had his weapon out and was letting his sonar run free. Everything in range showed unmoving, yet the sensation of being watched was real.

Slowing down his step, Max fell back closer to Tanila and the other two.

“Fowl, bash a line through each statue, so there is a path to walk through.”

Without needing an explanation, their warrior set to work, smashing into whatever statute it might be. Within minutes, elves, humans, goblins, wolves, and other stone creations lay in rubble.

As the hammer came toward the next unfortunate statue, it twisted and moved, dodging the strike and sending out a stone sword at Fowl.

His shield managed to make it up in time, the sound of rock on metal ringing out.

Roars came, and Max’s heart sank as the orc image Fowl had been ready to destroy attacked, and a dozen other statues all rushed at them from every side.

“Incoming!” Max shouted, raising an earthen wall in a second, playing *toss the healer* as his protective barrier went up.

Batrire had screamed for a second as Max’s hand grabbed her robe in the front, tossing her without any warning.

His next move was to hold out his hand and offer it to Tanila, who took the added assistance to reach the top of the wall in a moment.

Cordellia didn’t wait, raining down arrows with a volley shot and easily bounding up the wall.

Seeing the three working on getting to safety, Max focused his attention on the incoming attackers. He began to cast Fire Nova while staying in the center of the horde of different stone statues coming at them.

A human statue with two swords reached him first, falling to his weapon right before the fire nova pulsed out from him. The flames did nothing, washing over the attackers.

“Fowl!”

Their dwarf had managed to remove a leg from his current foe. Turning, he saw the monsters coming at his party.

Running as fast as his short legs would go, he drew close and activated his Taunt.

All but three of the statues turned and changed their direction, charging Fowl.

Max ran at the other three, those far enough away from Fowl that they hadn’t been in range, getting himself between his team on the air wall.

An empowered shot from Cordellia took the head off a goblin statue as an ice spear from Tanila tore through a stone elf, causing the monster to crumble.

Swinging his weapon at the wolf that had leaped into the air, trying to get to the three softer targets, Max’s blow shattered the statue into almost a hundred pieces. As the rocks fell to the ground, bounding off the soil, he spun to see Fowl taking out the group on him.

Each swing of the dwarf’s hammer either destroyed or crippled one of the monsters, while his shield and armor deflected most of the damage they tried to inflict upon him.

A boulder fell on the group on the left, crushing two of the attackers outright and knocking another one to the side.

Fowl continued to wade through the group, laughing as he swung his new weapon, roaring with excitement at what he could now do.

In less than a minute, all of the statues were down, shattered to pieces that littered the soil at their feet.

“So that wasn’t fun,” Batrire said after they got back on the ground. “Tossing a dwarf like that without warning isn’t appreciated.”

Max laughed and looked at Fowl, who was grinning from ear to ear.

“You seem to be enjoying this. Perhaps we should all just wait and let you do the work from now on.”

“I’d be happy to, but we must wait for my taunt to come off cooldown. At least now we know that they attack like that.”

It took almost eight hours to reach the outside of the coliseum, and they found themselves in the shadow of its massive size.

Stone gargoyles were perched on the ledges, eyes staring down at them, almost daring the party to get closer and risk getting bitten by their massive teeth.

“I’m not saying I’m afraid, but this thing gives me the creeps.”

Max nodded, agreeing with Fowl.

“It seems weird that we’ve done graveyards and other stuff, and yet right now, I’m not sure how I feel about this.”

Tanila pointed to a massive walkway a bit down to the right.

“Looks like that might be the entrance, except there are a lot more statues in the way.”

Everyone saw their mage was right. Statues of people crowded much closer together, carved with details showing their outfits and attire. Each one pointed at the entrance.

Fowl moved closer, weapon at the ready, and got to the first one, smashing it with his hammer.

“Not a monster.”

Without waiting, their warrior continued his movement through the stone crowd, destroying one masterful work of stone before beginning to crush another, clearing a wide berth for them to walk through.

“Seth… do you see this?”

Tanila’s eyes were wide, and her mouth hung open as she approached one of the statues and stared at its face.

Max turned and saw that every statue had the same expression. Eyes wide, mouth open, fear and pain craved into the stone.

“Fowl, wait!” Max shouted as the dwarf destroyed another statue.

As he spoke, thick metal gates rose up from the ground at the edge of the coliseum, rising to the top thirty feet above. The sound of metal clanging against stone rang out all around them as gates everywhere moved into place with a speed that was unnatural, sealing them inside.

“Oh goblin shite,” Batrire cursed. “Don’t tell, it's already started!”

Fowl spun, saw the concern look on Tanila’s face, and frowned.

“What am I missing? What are we facing?”

“A gorgon… something that turns people to stone.”

“Those are myths… aren’t they,” Fowl replied, his voice cracking at the end.

“Nothing is a myth in the tower,” Cordellia said, holding an arrow ready as she frowned. “If it’s a gorgon, we’re in trouble.”

Max nodded as he considered what they were dealing with.

“All those other floors,” he said in a hushed tone. “They were pointing to this.”

“You mean…” Tanila said and stopped herself as she understood what Max was implying.

“Dark, impossible tunnels, running from what we don’t want to see, creatures and monsters that feared the light or were made of stone. It was a warning of what we were going to face.”

Their ranger sucked air in through her teeth, wincing as she scanned the area they were at.

“How do we fight something that we can’t look at?”

“That’s not a problem for Seth,” Fowl replied as he grunted. “The real problem is, what will the rest of us do?”

“I’m not certain he can take one down by himself,” their mage replied. “We’ll need to back him up, but the other problem isn’t just you can’t look at a gorgon when it's close.”

“The poison,” Cordellia added. “It can turn you to stone in time as well.”

“Mother of dragon shite,” Fowl cursed.

A loud screech came from the inside of the colosseum and everyone turned toward the entrance they had been planning on going through.

“We need a plan and fast,” Max said.

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“Fight in the tunnel. Fowl stays near the back in case it can get to you from behind somehow. I’ll shout out the spells and help needed. You can keep your eyes on the ground but make sure that you don’t look up no matter what.”

Everyone nodded and moved toward the opening they planned to use.

“This isn’t a good fight,” Tanila said as she walked next to Max, keeping her head down while weaving between the statutes. “I’m not certain how much damage fire will do and I only have one other spell that might work but it will piss the gorgon off.”

Max shook his head and gave her arm a quick squeeze.

“It shouldn’t take that long. You use your spell, I’ll get in close and dispatch it. Right now all I need to do is keep you four alive.”

Cordellia laughed and her voice echoed off the stone floor.

“You’re strong but it’s a gorgon. They eat parties with ease.”

“That’s because most people can’t use their eyes,’ Max replied. “I don’t have that problem. Besides, with you using your bow on its body, any damage done will distract.”

Their archer nodded and went back to looking at the ground near her feet.

“You can’t use your berserker ability,” Tanila whispered.

Max grunted, having already known that.

“Hard to use when you can’t see it. I don’t want to risk using and finding out my eyes open on their own.”

He leaned over and kissed her quickly on the cheek before walking a little further forward.

“We need to hurry. I have no doubt it knows where we are, and I don’t want to have to fight in this–”

A crashing sound from the tunnel they were headed for snapped everyone’s attention to the tunnel.

“LOOK DOWN!” Max shouted as his sonar picked up the creature, rounding the corner and glaring at them.

As one, the four shifted their sight to the ground.

“Group up! I’ll advance!”

Max didn’t wait for a grunt or acknowledgment of their understanding.

Pressure began to push against him, a longing and a desire to open his eyes and see what it was that moved with tremendous speed in his direction.

With his sonar ability Max sensed the gorgon charging at him, smashing statutes in its path.

The long serpent's tail moved quickly along the floor and some ability had to have been used to reach that speed so quickly.

Forming an ice spear, Max sent it at the creature’s face when they were within twenty yards, sensing it dodging to the left with ease. As it moved in that direction, he swung his polearm, planning to catch it mid-dodge with his blade.

The snake part of its body shifted on the floor, moving just as quickly back to the right, bending and twisting, avoiding the attack with just a few inches to spare.

“Ice storm!”

Max moved as he shouted, swinging his weapon again and again, trying to slice some part of the creature that was dodging him and laughing. In its hands were two long swords, and for some reason, the boss hadn’t chosen to use them yet.

He had been preparing Frost Nova, and when the spell went off, the creature's speed slowed down enough that he almost managed to land a strike, only to be stopped when the gorgon parried the attack with its swords.

It hissed, spitting venom at Max, barely missing as his evasion ability and sonar worked together, allowing him to twist just in time.

Ice spears began to rain down upon the boss and the area where Max was fighting it. The positioning wasn’t perfect, but a few of the ice weapons sliced off some of the snakes that hissed and watched him and the party.

Casting a stone wall, Max blocked the creature's dodge as he swung again, this time his strike catching the back part of the tail.

Scales cracked and broke, only an inch cutting through as the gorgon slid back and to safety from him and the deluge of ice spears.

Rising to its full height the gorgon was over fourteen feet tall and at least twenty feet long. Moving to get back between it and his allies, Max squared up with the creature, summoning another ice spear and preparing to send it toward the monster.

Every snake that was facing him reared back and thrust forward at the same time, a volley of purple acid coming toward him.

Leaping into the air, Max landed on his ice spear and sent it toward the boss, using it as a quick ride toward the gorgon.

There weren’t going to be many chances to do any real damage and Max didn’t want to waste the abilities he had, knowing if he missed, it could mean the difference between life and death.

With the ice spear coming at the boss’s chest, Max swung down and across, wanting to see what it would do.

Like a snake, it coiled and rose, moving from the spot he had aimed for with the spell while putting its weapons in a path to not just defend but attack him.

Leaping again, Max moved to the side, the sound of his weapon clanging against one sword while the other whiffed through the spot his feet had just been.

Rolling after landing on the ground, he was up, leaping again to the side when the creature charged without a moment lost.

“Be ready! Ice and Empower!”

The game of mouse and snake was moving quickly, and Max didn’t have time to waste. Scales were forming at the spot of his first strike, and it appeared the gorgon had some kind of regeneration effect like his.

Finally, he had the boss’s back turned from his friends. He could sense the spear of ice on the outer edge of his sonar and knew it was time.

“Now!”

Both Tanila and Cordellia looked up just enough, sending their attacks at the boss.

The ranger's arrow struck, as the gorgon tried to dodge both attacks. Tanila’s ice spear roared past its head as the monster leaned to the side.

As it dodged, Max rushed it, swinging his blade at the spot where scales turned to flesh.

Like a contortionist, the gorgon moved again and Max was getting pissed, his second, third and fourth attack all missing no matter how fast or from where he attacked.

The hissing of the snakes filled the air and he realized what was causing the problems.

“Fireball the floor! Don’t aim to hit, just to explode!”

He began casting Fire Nova and stayed close, keeping the dance going, parrying and attacking, rolling and striking.

His spell went off, sending flames out and around him, racing up the body of the gorgon, who let out a scream.

Tanila’s fireball came a few seconds later, larger than he had expected. It missed hitting the part of the body she had aimed at. Still, when the spell hit the floor and exploded, the fire went everywhere, striking the gorgon's face and writhing hair, burning the ever-moving ball of snakes.

The monster cried out in pain as Tanila’s spell burned off a few of the lower snakes.

“Keep it up!”

Max continued his assault with his weapon, summoning a fireball. After deflecting the gorgon’s sword attack, he let it go aimed at the creature's face.

Knowing the boss would dodge, Max summoned an air wall right behind the spot the head had been, getting to sense the fireball hit the wall and erupt into flames, cascading its rain of fire down upon the weaker area of the boss.

The boss’s tail whipped at him suddenly, and without his eyes to know if a skill had been used, Max wasn’t able to dodge it.

[Bulwark]

Choosing to take the hit, he positioned the tip of his weapon in the path of the attack, impaling part of the creature’s tail on it.

The entire length of the tip, all fourteen inches, punched through the scales and into the boss's tender flesh inside. The force of its attack made Max’s arms ache, but the other scales around the point of entry also suffered damage from the force they struck into the blade and hammer portion.

[Regeneration]

Seeing his mana getting low, Max didn’t want to use any more offensive spells, knowing the drain would be his biggest problem.

As the pain in his arm began to disappear, the boss yanked its tail free, spilling blood all over the stone floor as it wiggled back and forth.

“Tanila! Ice Wall it on the right right on 3!”

Two attacks came quickly at Max, and he got into position, dodging and parrying as he prepared for a final assault. He needed to find a way to end this sooner rather than later.

Frantically, the gorgon stepped up its attacks, spewing poison. Its swords moved with speed and precision but not with the same skill as he had.

Each strike was easy to read and the hardest part was the constant barrage of poison coming from the snakes that were still not dead or burnt beyond use.

He had to dance with the creature for a while, luring it into position again, getting it to finally turn its back once more to the party.

“3!”

There wasn’t a chance to count down like he hoped but Max knew Tanila was always ready.

Casting his ice wall on the creature's right, both walls moved into position, wedging it in between.

Max rushed forward, ready to end this.

[Power Strike]

[Rampage]

[Magical Strike]

His attacks came faster than the boss could block, as his halberd cut through the flesh and scales, a massive hole opened up in the front, sending out a putrid smell and blood in his face.

Burning pain came as Max felt the poison from a few snakes above land on his arms and begin trickling through the armor.

His body immediately started to slow down as he felt the poison come in contact with his skin.

Kill it now!

Sensing the anxiety of the way his skill had shouted, Max delivered attack after attack, having cut through half of its chest.

The head! Cut off the head!

Max’s arms were getting heavy, and swinging felt incredibly hard. He could feel the poison spreading through his body and knew that there was a reaction taking place.

He was turning to stone.

A wall of earth appeared at the boss’s chest, trapping it between all three walls.

The snakes hissed and spit at him, sending more poison his way, but Max didn’t care. His choices were slim, and he felt the fear of what might be the end if he didn’t hurry.

His blade cut into the area near the boss’s neck, hacking off the snakes that tried to bite him. Their slithering bodies fell toward the ground and Max could tell he wasn’t going to make it in time. His attacks were not hitting with the power he needed.

The blade struck again, cutting through the neck an inch, yet there was too much flesh to get through before he would make it.

Take this and use it!

[All Cooldowns Refreshed]

Max used everything he had without wasting a second, knowing that his arms and torso were about to become stone and he wouldn’t be able to move again.

[Power Strike]

[Rampage]

[Magical Strike]

[Demonic Magic]

[Weakness]

The attacks felt slow, even though he knew they weren't, and when they struck, the head fell free.

Max’s chest was tight, and breathing was impossible.

A cold wave of power still went through him, and Max wanted to smile as he saw the stats roll by.

[10 Dexterity Consumed]

[10 Constitution Consumed]

[Skill Consumed is Equal to Rank of Current Skill]

[Power stored for future use]

[Consume has Consumed a Higher Rank Skill]

[Evasion - Uncommon has been upgraded to Evasion - Rare]

[Consume has Consumed a Higher Rank Skill]

[Consume has successfully Consumed a skill]

[Would you like to learn [Poison Immunity]?]

[Yes / No]

His mind raced to accept it, but before he could, the notification clicked yes for him.

The power of the new ability swept through his body and his chest fought back against the poison. His muscles and organs were locked in a state of half stone, half flesh, and the pain was impossible to describe. When Max had been melted by acid, his body didn't suffer like this because all of his nerves were destroyed. Here, it was a fight that raged across every one of them.

Slowly the poison was expunged, his regeneration helping to heal what had been injured as the process was halted.

That was not as close as I would like to see death come.

Max wanted to reply but he was too tired. All he wanted for a moment was to rest.

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"Seth!"

Everyone was saying his name, and he had fallen off the wall of earth he had created at some point.

Lying on his back, his weapon was still in his hand, unable to open as half of it was still stone.

Max could sense everyone coming near him.

"Say something!" Tanila shouted.

The panic in her voice pained him to hear, but it also felt wonderful because it meant he was really alive.

Most of the poison was gone. His arms and hands finally worked by the time everyone got close.

"I tried to heal!"

"We had to wait for the body to vanish!"

Everyone was shouting over each other, but Max just smiled as Tanila dropped to her knees, bending over his chest and looking into his eyes.

"Say something, please," she begged, tears running down her cheeks.

"You look amazing," he muttered, still not choosing to try and sit up. "Though it hurts when you push on me like that."

She sat up, took her hand off his chest, and winced.

"You almost died," Tanila whispered. "You were almost completely stone."

Nodding his head slightly, Max just grinned.

“You’re worth it.”

Fowl blew a raspberry and chuckled.

“Ok, he’s milking it now,” the warrior said.

The sound of a staff against metal rang out, and Max didn’t need his sonar to know Batrire had bonked Fowl again.

“That’s impossible,” Cordellia said out loud, gasping when she realized what she had done. “I mean… a gorgon’s poison… only a few rare potions… or a very high-level cure. It’s always deadly.”

“What can I say? I’m just built differently.”

Tanila groaned and held out a hand as Max sat up.

“I’m fine. Help me up, and let’s go see where this chest is and what the boss gave us.”

“That’s what I’m talking about,” Fowl said as he moved forward and held out his hand, pulling Max to his feet. The dwarf gave him a quick embrace and stepped back.

“Sorry, I couldn’t help more.”

Tapping his friend on the shoulder with his fist, Max smiled.

“You help a lot. Today, you were king of the stone creatures. I know for a fact you killed more than me today.”

Fowl grinned and nodded, his chest plate rising as he stuck it out a little.

“That is true. Now, lest we forget, there is a chest we need to find!”

Cordellia and the other two walked ahead, letting the pair of dwarves lead the way.

Tanila held Max’s hand, rubbing her thumb against it.

“How close were you?”

Sighing, Max grimaced.

“If my skill hadn’t helped, I’d be gone.”

She squeezed his hand and nodded, not saying another word.

“Holy mother of all dragon balls,” Fowl proclaimed. “Look at all that!”

In the center of the coliseum was a massive area at least one hundred and fifty yards across and seventy-five yards wide. All over the dirt floor were hundreds of different stone statues. Some were rare creatures and animals. Others were groups of what appeared to be parties of adventurers that had fallen to the gorgon.

“Does the tower use the same boss over and over?” Max asked. “I mean… the way the frost giant spoke. I thought those were just rumors or legends.”

Fowl chuckled at Max’s words.

“We forgetting how rumors and legends work now?”

Cordellia ignored the banter between the two and shook her head.

“There are bosses, again typically in the later levels, who are said to stay until defeated. Other times, a floor boss might vanish for a while, only to be rumored to have returned. That doesn’t usually happen until the thirty-fifth floor, though.”

Max nodded and pointed at the giant stone chest waiting in the center of the dirt floor.

“Well let's forget that for now and see what we won.”

Max broke a portion of the wall off with a kick, toppling a large piece of stone, and then summoned a stone wall from the ground, angled up to create a way down.

“You get the other one?” he asked, winking at Tanila.

She nodded, still holding his hand, and a steep ramp was ready for them to descend down.

Every statue looked so lifelike, all of them frozen in a horrible manner. Faces were contorted in pain and agony.

Near the occasional one was broken rubble, most likely the remains of ones the gorgon hadn’t liked.

The chest was the size of a raid one. It was made of stone-like granite with different flecks of color. Unlike all the other chests, which had a relief of what had been defeated, this one had a pile of rocks in the middle.

“That’s almost funny,” Fowl said, pointing at the design. “I think it’s your turn to open up the chest.”

Everyone nodded, and Max grinned, moving to the lid and tossing it open.

Inside were four double-sized green crystals, and Max knew Everett would be excited at seeing those.

A shield was waiting for him, a bracelet for Fowl, and snakeskin boots for Cordellia. The same colored stone armband as the chest was for Batrire, and a matching stone ring waited for Tanila.

Five green potions also waited inside.

“What are those?” Fowl asked, standing on his tiptoes to look over the edge.

Max withdrew one and inspected it, feeling his eyes widen at what he saw.

[*Inspect Potion*]

*****

Petrification Cure

Removes Petrification Curse from one entity

*****

“These remove petrification,” Max informed everyone, holding the potion up and looking at it from different directions.

“What would we do with these?” Cordellia asked, holding one in her hands.

Max took a deep breath and watched as everyone else reached in and withdrew one. Looking around, he saw all the stone statues and stored the potion. He pulled out the ring Everett had given him and slipped it on.

“What are you doing? Why are you bugging Everett?”

“Look around,” Max said as he waited to activate the ring. What if someone in here is a member of the Faction? If we could find that out and revive them, wouldn’t that be worth it?”

Her face scrunched, but she nodded.

Putting his fingers on both sides of the ring, Max waited for it to glow.

A clicking sound came, and then an image of Everett appeared above the ring, sitting behind his desk, with a look of concern showing over the man’s face.

“Everett? It’s Seth.”

“I can see that! What’s wrong?!”

“Nothing,” Max replied with a grin. I'm sorry. It's my first time using the ring, and I wasn’t expecting to see a floating image of you. As for what I need, do you know of any Faction members who fought a gorgon boss and died?”

The older man’s head was visible by all snapping back before it leaned very close, the image getting focused on his face. Both eyes were about as wide as possible.

“YOU KILLED A GORGON?!”

“Well, obviously, or we’d be stone and not calling.”

The man coughed and choked, banging on his chest, and everyone snickered at the sight of it.

“We got a potion that cures petrification, and we weren’t sure if we should save them or see if someone from our Faction had died to a gorgon. If so, and if any of these statues were one of our members, we’d like to try to save them.”

“Give me like fifteen minutes! I need to check some stuff! Turn the ring off and save the power!”

Before Max could reply, the image of Everett was gone. Holding his fingers on the ring, it returned to normal.

“I guess we should loot while we wait and see,” Fowl said, rubbing his hands together and glancing at the chest.

“You’re seriously going to use up a potion like that?” Cordellia asked.

Max saw how her eyes kept blinking rapidly as she stared at him.

“If you were one of them, wouldn’t you want someone to save you?”

“I mean yah… but… how do you even know one of those will work? How can you make sure one of them is actually a member of our Faction?”

Fowl cackled gleefully as he slipped his loot on, and Batrire and Tanila were also taking out their items.

“Call me interested. Even if we lose one potion, it's a risk I’m okay taking if it means saving someone's life.”

“Just let it go,” Fowl said as he joined the two of them. “Get your loot and realize he’s a lost cause. If there is one thing Seth can’t help himself with, it’s helping other people.”

Shaking her head, their ranger gave Max one more look before moving to the chest and withdrawing her new boots.

The look on her face when she saw the stats made her forget the concern she had just a moment ago.

“Looks like you’re up,” Fowl said while winking at him.”

Max nodded and moved to the chest, reaching in and feeling the shield materialize in his hand.

A green scale covered heater shield like Dexic’s came out as he moved his hand back, earning a whistle of appreciation from Fowl.

[*Inspect Weapon*]

*****

Gorgon Scaled Shield

+20 Strength, Constitution, Dexterity

Impervious

Indestructible

Bonded

*****

The stats were nice, and having a shield that could stand up to almost anything was an added perk. After having his last shield shattered, it hadn’t been fun using the backup one, which provided almost no stats at all.

“That looks pretty sick,” Fowl said with a grin. “Does it turn your enemies to stone?”

Laughing, Max shook his head.

“I’m not certain I’d want something like that. Imagine how dangerous it would be, especially if someone managed to get it from me.”

Fowl nodded and then motioned to the rest of the items in the chest.

“Take those, and I guess we can scout out the floor and start studying the statues. That way, if Everett comes back with something, we may already have an idea of the person he’s talking about.”

Max’s shield hit the ground, and everyone turned, just as stunned as he was.

“You ok?”

“My god, Fowl, that was the smartest thing I think I’ve ever heard you say,” Max replied, his face frozen in shock.

“Bah, screw you,” Fowl muttered as he made a hand gesture, moving toward some of the statues.

Max picked up his shield and saw Batrire smirking, watching her man walk away.

“You ok?”

She nodded at him and started jogging after Fowl, grinning the whole time.

“He’s right,” Tanila said. “I’ll go this way, and you two can go opposite ways. We got a few minutes before it’s time to contact him again.”

Cordellia turned, still struggling it appeared based on her body language and how stiffly she was walking.

They spent their time moving through the statues, finding that over half of them were humans, elves, or dwarves, while the other half were a variety of different creatures. Some looked like the goblins they faced that exploded when killed. Others were snakes that were leaning back, mouths open and in apparent angst as they froze. A few minotaurs and other monsters were missing arms, yet all had the same look of pain.

“You there?”

Everett’s face appeared and he nodded, holding a book as Tom’s face appeared over the man’s shoulder.

“I have a book of things we know. We’ll use most of this ring if you want to go through the list. You got four more. Hopefully, we can verify that someone in here is there, and that works.”

“And way to go!” Tom shouted behind him. “A gorgon that’s–”

“Tom!”

Their Faction leader's outburst cut their trainer off, and then Everett turned back to them,

“Let’s start.”

Three rings were used, and they had a list of people and descriptions to look for. Fowl thought he had already seen one but needed to verify that others thought so. It took them about forty minutes as they moved around the dirt floor, scanning each statute and comparing it to their lists.

“I think there are three candidates,” Tanila said. “One is almost certain, as they have the same scar on Everett mentioned. I guess we’ll use the ring and check and then try the potion.”

Everyone nodded and followed her to the dwarven warrior she had found.

“Does this look like him?” Max asked as he held the ring close to the dwarf’s face.

“By the gods, that’s him! That’s Mustuck!” Everett exclaimed, coming out of his seat and leaning as close as possible to the communication device.

“Ok!” Max replied, just as excited to hear that news. “Now back up a moment so I can see more than your eye, and let's see if this is him and if it works.”

He nodded at Tanila, who took her potion and pulled out the stopper.

“I’m just pouring it on top as his mouth can’t drink it?” she asked

“That’s how it is supposed to work,” Everett replied.

She slowly poured the green liquid all over the dwarf’s hair, watching it run down the stone some before absorbing into it.

When the bottle was empty and not a single drop remained inside, Tanila stepped back, and everyone waited.

“Anything?” Tom asked through the connection.

“Nothing yet.”

Another minute passed, and everyone sighed, wishing it had worked but nothing had happened.

Grunting, Everett leaned back in his chair.

“Well, I appreciate you trying. That speaks a lot about your commitment to–”

“It cracked!” Fowl exclaimed. “By Ockrim’s beard, it’s cracking!”

His shout caused them to turn and watch as the stone began to show more lines and fractures until the entire statue was covered with cracks. All of a sudden the statue moved and everyone jumped back a step.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

The loud scream that came from the dwarf’s mouth frightened everyone as he fell forward, his arms and legs windmilling before Max reached out and caught him.

“Mustuck!’ he exclaimed.

“Wah… who the hell are you!” the dwarf exclaimed, backing up from Max’s grasp.

“Mustuck! It’s me, old friend!”

Everett’s voice snapped the dwarf out of his confusion, and he turned his green eyes to see the image floating above Max’s ring.

“Everett? That’s you? What happened? You’re old…”

Chuckles came through the connection and Tom leaned forward.

“And you’re still fat,” their trainer replied.

“Bah, you’re a bastard, and you know it!” the dwarf shouted, grinning now. “Wait a second. Someone tell me what happened and what is going on!”

“We don’t have time,” Max said quickly. “Let me find another statue and show you in a minute. We can tell you on the way.”

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Only one other statue was another Faction member that they could tell, and with just one ring left, they brought back a human woman named Sulenda, who towered over all of them. Her arms were bigger than their legs, and she shared a carriage with Batrire and Cordellia, taking up half of it.

The Faction house was ablaze with joy as the news of two long-lost members returning spread like wildfire. Mustuck, absent for over forty years, and Sulenda, missing for about eighty, were back among them. The disbelief in their eyes was palpable, realizing they had been encased in stone for so long, yet someone had managed to rescue them.

Drinks were flowing, and everyone was coming up to the five of them, celebrating their success.

When it was time to sleep, most found that the sun came up only a few hours later.

Everett was tapping his fingers on the desk, looking across at Max.

His face was a canvas of conflicting emotions, at times furrowing in deep thought, at others breaking into a faint smile. The uncertainty of what to say next was etched on his features, a testament to the gravity of the situation.

“You killed a gorgon… something no one should see before the thirty-fifth level. I’m afraid I can’t keep that a secret, as your Faction members are already telling the news to everyone in town. The good part is Tom created the story ahead of time about how you had a large mirror on you because of moving and shopping. Luring the gorgon around the corner, where it saw its own reflection, is what won the day.”

Max nodded, still impressed that both men had come up with a story so quickly.

“That mirror now resides in the main hall, and those fools already want us to place it on the wall of honor.

“I want to know how… you could defeat something that Tom and I are not sure we could have defeated unprepared. One wrong move means death.”

“It took everyone. Tanila used walls to wedge it in place. Cordellia shot only when able to look at its back. And–”

“Don’t lie.”

The faction leader’s tone was hard.

“I’m tired of the lies, and what scares me even more is that right now, I’m not certain if we were to fight that I would win.”

Leaning against the desk, Everett’s eyes narrowed.

“You give off an aura of death while hiding it because you aren’t a killer. Inside, I see a person capable of great destruction and great potential. What scares me is which of those you will become and the role I play in that.

“Ever since the day you walked into that door, you’ve been lying. I realize it now. Part of me wanted to believe that you were Seth Pendal, skilled with a spear. I needed to believe there was a hero waiting to rise again and help our land.”

Shifting in his seat, the older man’s eyes never left Max’s.

“You do things that aren’t possible. You craft legendary weapons! You hold a dragon’s tooth that I know is worth more than anything we have in our vaults! You push through the tower like a good party does the early dungeons in a small town!”

His voice continued to get louder as Everett talked.

“And now! Now you bring back two heroes this Faction lost without any thought about the money those potions were worth or how they might save your life in the future! None of this makes sense for someone with your power!”

Grunting, he leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath, sighing as he let it out.

“I’m not sure I can keep this charade going,” Everett said quietly. “This Faction is everything to me, and if you want to be a part of it, we’re going to have to find out how to work together without the lies. Are you willing to do that?”

The moment Max had been dreading had finally arrived, only much sooner than he had hoped.

“I’m not sure you can handle the truth,” he replied, watching every reaction Everett made as he spoke. “If you can provide a way that will bind you to never reveal what I

will share, then I will be honest. Without that, I'll ask for my leave, request any payment owed plus items back and we will be forced to find a new Faction it appears."

Snorting, Everett shook his head, closing his eyes and rubbing them with his fingers.

"You say that so casually. I believe you would. Whatever your secret is, it must be so great that you would rather leave what I know you care about, displayed by your actions today."

Rising from the chair, Everett moved to one of the shelves behind his desk.

He did something with a series of books, and Max saw the pattern with his sonar skills.

A wall moved, sliding to reveal a chest. Pulling the key from his storage, Everett unlocked the chest and pulled out a clear piece of crystal. It was eight inches long and about an inch thick.

Closing the chest, he motioned, and the wall slid back into place.

"This," Everett said as he held up the crystal stick and moved toward his desk, "is a binding rod. One promise. It will stop me If I attempt to break that promise in any way. The punishment is not fun, and continued attempts will lead to death. Tell me Seth, is this truth you promise worth me using this?"

Max stood up from his chair and took off his Ring of Growth.

"This… this is a ring we got in the tower not long after we started. It gives ten percent to all my stats."

Everett's hands fumbled the rod, but thankfully, his speed and dexterity were enough for him to catch it before it hit the floor.

"Impossible! I mean that's… you're serious… I can see it on your face."

Nodding, Max slipped it back on.

"What I'm going to tell you if you bind yourself to that promise will be worth far more than you can imagine."

Everett nodded, and within thirty seconds, he had made the pact, binding himself to the truth, even unto death.

Five minutes had passed since Max had finished telling him most of the whole story. He couldn't share about the deal with the dragon. Showing the dragon scale had almost caused Everett to die from choking on his drink.

Now, the older man was slowly turning his glass of good alcohol on the desk.

"I can't imagine," he muttered. Everything you've been through, the potential of what you could become, the fact… that you have a skill—I would strike you dead if I could and didn't know the real you. Yet you're the kindest soul I have ever met."

“Listen to me, Everett. I didn’t ask for this skill. I wanted to be that happy baker, getting fat and having kids with a cute redheaded girl from back home. None of that matters.”

Setting the empty cup he had long since drank on the desk, Max stood up, seemingly taller even though he hadn’t grown.

“Only one thing matters, and that is protecting those I love. You already know I love this Faction, and every day, it grows on me. It pained me to do what I had to do to Baldin… more than you will know—but we both knew it needed to. Often, I wonder if the gods made all that happen just so I could have the skill, so I could provide what no one else could.

“Does that suck? Yes!” Max exclaimed, banging his hand on the desk, making sure that he didn’t break it. “I’m done playing their games. If the gods want me to get strong, then I will, and when we beat the tower and get to go against them, they will regret the day they messed with my family and friends. I will make sure they suffer for causing innocent people to die!”

Max was breathing hard, his eyes shaking as he clenched his fists.

“The skill you worry about has changed because it has realized what the gods will one day realize. I am my own person. No one will force me to become something I don’t want to be. When I find the gods responsible for killing people we care about, be certain I will beat the life out of them. I will make them regret ever involving us in whatever game they are playing.”

Everett nodded, seeing the truth and conviction in Max’s eyes. He knew there was only one thing he could ask him to share.

“I’m going to ask. You know what it is. Do you trust me with that knowledge?”

“My stats and skills?”

“Just your stats… I’m… I don’t think I could handle knowing everything you possess. There are ideas already running through my head, and knowing the truth… It would probably break me.”

“Very well,” Max replied. “I’ll tell you my stats, just the base. That way you’ll have some stuff left to wonder and guess about when combined with my items.”

Grinning, Everett nodded.

[Simple Base Stat Check]

*****

Max Hoste

18-Year-old Human Male

Level 1

Exp 76/1000

Tower Experience: 14.91%

HP: 1900/1900

MP: 1500/1500

Stamina: 950/950

STR: 180

DEX: 160

CON: 190

INT: 150

WIS: 150

Defense of the Dragon - 7.5%

Defense of the Demon - 7.0%

Demon Essence: - 308

*****

Everett said nothing for a moment. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Doing the math in his head told him things he couldn't begin to imagine.

"One hundred and seventy…"

"None of my stats are one hundred and seventy," Max replied.

"No… your level… for that many stats… you could…"

Everett froze, his mouth still open, and he looked up at Max in shock.

"You could have beaten Dexic in that duel."

Wincing and frowning, Max shook his head for a few seconds and then finally nodded.

"Yes, but only if I used skills. She is strong."

Scoffing, the Faction leader leaned back in his chairs, eyes wide as he gazed up at the ceiling.

After a few more seconds, Everett regained his composure, took a breath, and cleared his throat.

"Very well. I will protect your secret and help you and your team complete the tower."

Rising to his feet, he held out his hand and extended it toward Max.

“Know that not even death will pry this truth from me. Just promise me one thing.”

As Max shook the man’s hand, he felt the grip getting tight. He was pulled forward slightly, almost leaning over the desk.

“Kill whoever made Baldin die for me.”

Max nodded, and Everett let go of the man’s hand.

“Protect the ones you love, Seth. Without them, the world is a very painful place.”

Turning slightly, Max pointed at the door.

“Out there are three people I would give my life for in a second, but if someone hurts them, rest assured, there will be no place for them to hide.”

Neither said another word, and Max made his way out of the office.

With the door shut, Everett sobbed for a moment, realizing that someone he loved had been hurt in some game of the gods.

Wiping his tears, he looked at the door and grinned. There was a dark gleam in his eyes as he stared at the door.

“Whoever made up this game, you better run. That boy is going to kill you all.”

And then Everett laughed so hard that the room was filled with a sound so pure it hadn’t heard in a decade.

A NOTE FROM DADS BEDTIME STORIES

AHHHH Book 4 just ended....

Book 5... well it starts monday.... I know, I know...

Enjoy the next few days. Read my Viking story, take a walk.

Good news is book 7 is in the writing process!